



## **BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS**

### **What is the Synod of Bishops?**

The Synod of Bishops is a permanent institution of the Catholic Church. It was established by Pope Paul VI in 1965, shortly after the close of the Second Vatican Council, to continue the spirit of collegiality and communion that was present at the Council. The Synod is an assembly of bishops from around the world who assist the Holy Father by providing counsel on important questions facing the Church in a manner that preserves the Church's teaching and strengthens her internal discipline.

### **When does the Synod of Bishops meet?**

The Synod of Bishops meets at the request of the Holy Father, when he considers it necessary or opportune to consult with the world's bishops.

### **What are the meetings of the Synod of Bishops called?**

The Synod of Bishops can meet in a *General Assembly (or Session)* on topics that pertain to the entire Church; these kinds of sessions can be either *Ordinary* or *Extraordinary*. The Synod of Bishops can also meet in a *Special Assembly (or Session)* on topics that pertain to a limited geographical area. For example, Special Assemblies have been held in recent years on topics concerning the Middle East and Africa.

### **What is an Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops?**

A General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is called "Ordinary" if its topic is "for the good of the universal Church" and seems to require the "learning, prudence and counsel" of all the world's bishops.

### **What is an Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops?**

A General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is called "Extraordinary" when it is convened to deal with matters "which require a speedy solution" and which demand "immediate attention for the good of the entire Church".

### **Who are the heads of the Synod of Bishops?**

The President of the Synod is the current Holy Father, Pope Francis. The Synod also has a General Secretary, who is currently Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri.



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### **III EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON THE FAMILY (2014)**

This Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will be the third ever held; previous Extraordinary General Assemblies were held in 1969 and 1985.

#### **What is the theme of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops?**

"The pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization"

#### **What are the dates of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops?**

October 5-19, 2014

#### **Where will the III Extraordinary Synod take place?**

Vatican City

#### **What is the purpose of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops?**

The *Preparatory Document* described the purpose of the III Extraordinary General Assembly as "to define the '*status quaestionis*' [current situation] and to collect the bishops' experiences and proposals in proclaiming and living the Gospel of the Family in a credible manner." The *Instrumentum Laboris* said that the III Extraordinary General Assembly "will thoroughly examine and analyze the information, testimonies and recommendations received from the particular Churches in order to respond to the new challenges of the family."

#### **What documents have been released in advance of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops?**

**November 2013:** The **Preparatory Document**. . . outlined the purpose of both the Extraordinary and Ordinary General Assemblies, provided a basic catechesis on the Gospel of the Family, and requested input from the world's bishops on nine questions about the current state of pastoral care for marriages and families.

**June 2014:** The **Instrumentum Laboris**. . . contained the results of the consultation achieved via the *Preparatory Document's* questionnaire. This document provides a substantive reflection on the major challenges facing the family today, and outlines the topics that will be discussed at the Extraordinary General Assembly.



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## **XIV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON THE FAMILY (2015)**

The most recent Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was held in 2012 (XIII Ordinary General Assembly on the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith)

### **What are the dates of the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops?**

October 4-25, 2015. This Synod will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Synod of Bishops.

### **What is the theme of the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops?**

"Jesus Christ reveals the mystery and vocation of the family" (Vatican News, press conference. . . to present the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops)

### **What is the purpose of the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops?**

The XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will continue the work of the III Extraordinary General Assembly by "reflect[ing] further on the points discussed so as to formulate appropriate pastoral guidelines" for the pastoral care of the person and the family (*Instrumentum Laboris*, III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops).

### **Where will the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops take place?**

Vatican City



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## **OTHER QUESTIONS**

### **What is the relationship between the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops?**

The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the III Extraordinary General Assembly notes that the work of the Synod of Bishops "is to take place in two stages, forming a single organic unity." The Extraordinary General Assembly could be understood in a certain sense as a preparatory step for the Ordinary General Assembly. At the Extraordinary General Assembly, the bishops will define the current state of the family and challenges that face it; at the Ordinary General Assembly, the bishops will formulate pastoral guidelines to respond to those challenges.

### **Will there be a document issued after the two Synods of Bishops?**

After an Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, it is common for the Holy Father to issue a substantive document, called a post-synodal apostolic exhortation, which takes up the themes of the Synod and deepens them further. It is also expected that after the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, one or more documents will be issued in preparation for the Ordinary General Assembly.

### **When was the last time a Synod of Bishops discussed marriage and the family?**

The most recent Synod of Bishops on the theme of the family took place in 1980 (V Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops). Pope St. John Paul II's 1981 apostolic exhortation 'Familiaris Consortio', on the role of the Christian family in the modern world, was written at the request of that Synod's Fathers.

*Source: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops*