

Full Participation In The Synod

In a very short time from now, Sister Elizabeth Davis will leave Newfoundland and Labrador to attend the Synod on Synodality in Rome. The call of the Synod is to: Communion, Participation and Mission.

Elizabeth will be among 364 voting members in the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod and one of two Sisters of Mercy who will be voting members. The second Sister of Mercy is Sister Angela Perez from Guam, a member of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.



For the first time, laypeople will not only participate in the Synod of Bishops' assembly but also will be full members, with the ability to vote on a final document at the end of the process in October 2024. More than 50 women will be voting members in the assembly scheduled for October 4–29, 2023, at the Vatican. Elizabeth is among five women religious chosen through the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) as voting members. Other women religious, including Sister Angela, have been named by the Conferences of Bishops.

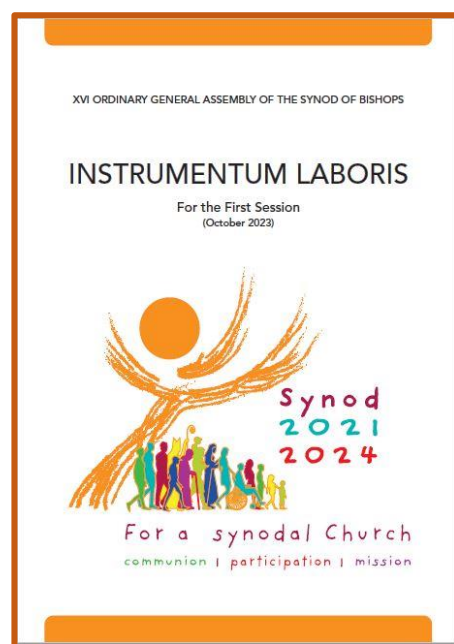
During the nearly month-long Vatican assembly, the delegates will discuss questions posed in the recently released document *Instrumentum Laboris*, which covers such controversial topics as women deacons, priestly celibacy, and LGBTQ outreach and highlights a desire for new institutional bodies to allow for greater participation in decision-making by the “People of God.”

The 50-page document was written in April and May 2023 and approved by Pope Francis. The text itself stresses that it is “not a document of the Church’s Magisterium, nor is it the report of a sociological survey” but instead presents the “priorities that emerged from listening to the People of God” in the global Synod process thus far.

This document has two parts. Part One summarizes the insights gained from the listening sessions at the diocesan, national and continental levels, and outlines the vision of what a synodal church is and how it should proceed.

Part Two is comprised of a series of fifteen worksheets intended to guide the small group discussions at the assembly. The text outlines a “synodal method” of spirituality focused on listening to the Spirit and discerning the “signs of the times.”

In a change from recent Synods, Pope Francis has extended the timeframe of the Synod over three years (2021 to 2024) and has divided the general assembly into two sessions, one to be held in October 2023 and the second in October 2024. According to Cardinal Mario Grech, the head of the Vatican’s Synod office, conclusions will be reached only after the second and final



session in 2024. At the end of the process in 2024, Synod assembly participants will vote on an advisory final document that will be presented to the pope, who can decide, if he wishes, to adopt the text as a papal document or to write his own at the conclusion of the Synod.

Canadian Bishops attending are Archbishop J. Michael Miller, C.S.B., Archdiocese of Vancouver; Bishop William T. McGrattan, Diocese of Calgary and Vice President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops; Bishop Marc Pelchat, Archdiocese of Quebec; Bishop Raymond Poisson, Bishop of Saint-Jérôme-Mont-Laurier and President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops; and Cardinal Gérald C. Lacroix, Archdiocese of Quebec.

In addition to the five Canadian Bishops, Canadian voting members representing the wider church are: Sami Aoun, Nominee of the Maronite, Melkite, and Syriac Catholic Churches in Canada; Catherine Clifford, Archdiocese of Gatineau, QC; Sr. Chantal Desmarais, scsm, Diocese of Joliette, QC; Linda Staudt, Diocese of London, ON; and Sister Elizabeth Davis rsm, Archdiocese of St. John's, NL.

We congratulate Elizabeth for having responded so generously and courageously to this historic and very sacred invitation to participate in the Synod of the universal church and for being the voice of people in all their diversity and of all creation (which we know she will be!). We wish her well in the many demands of travel, "living out of a suitcase," preparation, meetings, discussions, participation, and collaboration with representatives from around the world. We are proud and grateful that Elizabeth will participate in the Synod. We know that she will have great influence in her contribution to the Synod for the church and for the sake the world over the next year and beyond.

We offer this prayer for Elizabeth and for the Synod:

*Holy and Triune God, we thank you for calling us to be Your Church,
and for showing her newer and more relevant ways of being
the Sign and Sacrament of God.
As the Synodal journey which began two years ago,
finds its culmination in the Synodal Event in October 2023,
we pray for a more intense experience of Your Spirit for all the faithful.
We thank you for blessing the Synodal preparatory work in communities,
institutions and by individuals.
May the significant event of the Synod open new doors for the Church
in her self-understanding and mission.
May the Synod remain open to grace, and approach all things
with humility and courage.
Dispose it to hear "what the Spirit is saying to the Church" (Rev 3:22)
and where the Spirit is blowing it to action. Amen.*

Sr. Mary John Kudiyiruppil, SSpS