

**Pastoral and Finance Councils in a Synodal Church**  
Mark F. Fischer, Parish Administration, September 23, 2023

1. The Synodal Church. The World Synod of Bishops will meet in Rome starting October 4. This is the culmination of a process begun by Pope Francis in 2021. The topic is “synodality,” defined as how the church can go forward together. The “listening phase” of this process has taken place locally, nationally, and at the continental level.
  - A. Local. The Los Angeles archdiocese held many listening sessions, the results of which were published.<sup>1</sup> The report focused on key themes: speaking and listening, celebrating, going on mission, dialoguing, discerning and deciding, and growing in synodality.
  - B. National. The themes that emerged in Los Angeles and other dioceses of the USA were assimilated in a document published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.<sup>2</sup> It emphasized the importance of enhancing communion and participation, of ongoing formation for mission, and of discerning the future of the church.
  - C. Continental. The thoughts of U.S. Catholics were synthesized along with the thinking of delegates from Canada.<sup>3</sup> The synthesis focused on Baptism, Communion, and Mission.
  - D. Deliberation. The second “deliberative” phase of the synod will consist of two gatherings in Rome in October of 2023 and in October of 2024. There the bishops and other participants will “deliberate” by offering their advice to Pope Francis. The bishops’ working document, the *Instrumentum Laboris*, will guide the second phase.<sup>4</sup> The synodal process has twelve characteristic signs: the dignity stemming from baptism, the church’s willingness to serve and listen, the willingness of Catholics to learn from one another and to ask forgiveness, our hunger to be a people of encounter and dialogue, our acceptance of differences, our openness and honesty, our ability to live with tensions, our confession of incompleteness, our liturgical celebrations, and our engagement in discernment.
2. Pastoral and Finance Councils in a Synodal Church. Undoubtedly the synodal path recommended by Pope Francis will affect the Church at every level, including the parish councils. But there are two differences between a synod listening session and a council:
  - A. Councils as Consultative. Pastors consult councils. By posing a question to a council, the pastor asks it to do three things: investigate, reflect, and recommend a conclusion. Synodality is a process, but the pastoral council is an office.
  - B. Councils as Practical. The matter of parish councils has to do with practical things, not with faith and morals. Councils exist to advise the pastor about the topic under consultation, so that the pastor can be a good shepherd. Synod listening sessions may consider any topic.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2022 ADLA Synod Report can be accessed at:  
<https://synod.lacatholics.org/documents/2022/9/ADLA%20Diocesan%20Synthesis%20Submission.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The U.S. National Synthesis can be accessed at:  
<https://www.usccb.org/resources/US%20National%20Synthesis%202021-2023%20Synod.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> North American Final Document for the Continental Stage of the 2021-2024 Synod:  
<https://www.usccb.org/resources/North%20American%20Final%20Document%20-%20English.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Instrumentum Laboris: [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/universal-stage/il/ENG\\_INSTRUMENTUM-LABORIS.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/universal-stage/il/ENG_INSTRUMENTUM-LABORIS.pdf)