

By Tony DeGol
Proclaim!

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The Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, along with other dioceses around the world, is about to begin a journey that could change the Church forever.

This weekend, Bishop Mark will launch the diocesan phase of the process leading to a Synod of Bishops in 2023.

The Bishop will appear on *Proclaim!* TV Sunday at 10:30 a.m. on WATM ABC 23 to discuss the vision for the Synod and the importance of engagement here on the local level. He will then celebrate the *Proclaim!* TV Mass at Saint John Gualbert Cathedral in Johnstown at which time he will address the Synod in his homily.

Pope Francis formally opened the synod process on October 10 during a Mass at Saint Peter's Basilica. Bishops around the world have been asked to open the diocesan phase in their respective dioceses this weekend.

By definition, a synod is an assembly of clergy and sometimes laity.

In this particular synod, Bishop Mark stressed, the voices of everyday Catholics are going to be key.



"The process that we're going to be engaging in is going to be worldwide, and the Pope wants us to start on the ground level," he explained. "Our diocese is going to have to come up with a steering committee, and then there will be opportunities to sound out the people."

Local faithful are familiar with parish pastoral councils and other similar groups that convene to discuss matters with their pastors, the Bishop noted.

"This is going to be on a diocesan-wide level, and we might bring people from different parishes together for conversations," he added. "It's all about the listening to each other, identifying what's really on the minds and in the

hearts of people that is affecting their lives as Catholics, and then finding new paths to journey in our faith.”

The theme of this upcoming process is “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission.”

According to the International Theological Commission, synodality is “the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God.”



In his homily last weekend, Pope Francis encouraged the faithful to listen to the Holy Spirit throughout this process and devote time to prayer and adoration.

“We too are called to become experts in the art of encounter – not so much by organizing events or theorizing about problems as in taking time to encounter the Lord and one another,” he stated.

Listening to “the questions, concerns, and hopes of every church, people, and nation” is essential, the Holy Father stressed.

The diocesan phase of the synod will continue through April 2022. The worldwide synod will conclude with the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in October 2023.

Editor’s Notes: Catholic News Service contributed to this story. For more of Bishop Mark’s thoughts on the synod, watch Proclaim! TV on October 17 at 10:30 a.m. on WATM ABC 23 followed by the live Mass broadcast with the Bishop at 11:00 a.m. Please follow diocesan media for continuing updates on the synod.