



# DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

## NEWS RELEASE

October 15, 2021

## Contact:

Annalise Laumeyer, director of communications  
Phone: 616-551-5629 | 616-307-3474 cell  
Email: [alaumeyer@grdiocese.org](mailto:alaumeyer@grdiocese.org)

## Diocese of Grand Rapids to take part in worldwide synod process

**GRAND RAPIDS, Mich.** – Catholics in West Michigan are invited to take part in a synod process encompassing the whole Church at the diocesan, national and universal level. Pope Francis has asked every (Arch)diocese in the world to provide input for a document that will serve as the basis of discussion for the next Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome in October 2023. The topic of the synod is “For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.” Synodality, as [defined](#) by the International Theological Commission, is “the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God.”

The enhanced process will take place over two years, beginning in individual dioceses (see the timeline below). **Bishop Walkowiak will formally open the synod process for the Diocese of Grand Rapids on Sunday, Oct. 17 at the 10 a.m. televised Mass live from the Cathedral of Saint Andrew (301 Sheldon Blvd).**

Bishop Walkowiak has appointed Greg Deja, executive director of the Catholic Foundation of West Michigan and a parishioner at St. Paul the Apostle Parish in Grand Rapids, and Mary Lehman-Panek, trustee of the Catholic Foundation of West Michigan and a parishioner at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Belmont, as co-chairs of the diocesan synod process.

“I’m honored to respond to Pope Francis’ invitation to contribute to the journey of the universal Church through this synod,” said Deja when asked about his appointment.

The enhanced process invites more participation at the local level. “The synod is an opportunity for prayer and conversations that will inform the future direction of the Church,” said Panek. “It will be a period of spiritual growth for each of us and I’m pleased to participate as a co-chair for the Diocese of Grand Rapids.”

Bishop Walkowiak, in partnership with Deja and Panek, will lead a team of nine individuals who will create opportunities for consultations throughout the diocese. Consultations will take place from November 2021 to February 2022 across the diocese’s 11-county footprint. A detailed schedule of sessions will be issued soon and made available at [grdiocese.org](http://grdiocese.org).

“I am looking forward to listening to our holy people of God in the months ahead,” said Bishop Walkowiak. “May our efforts to assist in this preparatory process help us foster the bonds of communion among ourselves and the worldwide Church.”



# DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

## *Synod Timeline:*

### **Diocesan Phase (October 2021 – April 2022)**

During the diocesan phase, each bishop is asked to undertake a consultation process within his respective diocese. Each bishop is asked to appoint co-chairs to help him shepherd the diocese through this process. To assist in the synod, the Vatican has sent dioceses a preparatory document, accompanied by a questionnaire, and a guide (known as a “vademecum”) with proposals for consultation.

The questions are categorized under 10 general themes, and people can respond to what is most relevant to their situation and “share with honesty and openness about their real-life experiences, and to reflect together on what the Holy Spirit might be revealing through what they share with one another,” the document said.

The responses to the questionnaires will be compiled into a diocesan synthesis for discussion at the episcopal conference level. In the U.S., this is the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) (USCCB). They will integrate the suggestions gathered during the diocesan level and combine them into a document for the entire United States.

### **Instrumentum laboris draft #1 created (April – September 2022)**

Vatican officials will create a first draft of the synod’s instrumentum laboris, or working document, from the submitted texts.

### **Continental Phase (September 2022-March 2023)**

In the second phase of the process, bishops gather on each continent to discuss the first draft of the instrumentum laboris and submit their thoughts to the Vatican. A second draft of the working document will be created from these texts and released by June 2023.

### **Synod of Bishops (October 2023)**

The synodal assembly meets in Rome to discuss the second draft of the working document and produce a Final Document for Pope Francis’ review. Pope Francis decides on the publication of the Final Document.

Synod participants include Church leaders and delegates nominated by Pope Francis or their episcopal conference, in addition to Vatican department heads. The synodal assembly is held in accord with *episcopalis communio*, an apostolic constitution, issued by Pope Francis in 2018.

*The Diocese of Grand Rapids serves more than 175,114 Catholics, 80 parishes and 31 schools in an 11-county area of West Michigan. For additional information visit our website, [grdiocese.org](#). Connect with the diocese on [Facebook](#) (Diocese of Grand Rapids), [Twitter](#) (@GRDiocese), and Instagram ([@GRDiocese](#)).*

###

## *Notes to editors:*

- The live broadcast of Sunday Mass may be watched on FOX 17, the diocesan website or Facebook page
- Headshots of Bishop Walkowiak, Greg Deja, and Mary Lehman-Panek are [available here](#).
- [Official website](#) and [diocesan webpage](#) for Synod 2023
- Information on the [enhanced synod process](#) from Catholic News Service