

THE VATICAN'S EXTRAORDINARY SYNOD CATHOLIC CHURCH AT CRITICAL JUNCTURE



From October 5 to 19, 2014, Pope Francis will convene a rare Extraordinary Synod, titled *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*. Among the subjects to be discussed at this gathering of church leaders, which includes several U.S. bishops, will be issues pertaining to the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender and female Catholics. This is the first of two such gatherings, with the next in October 2015. Based on these gatherings, Pope Francis will release new doctrine in fall 2015 that will shape church policy about LGBT issues and women's equality for decades to come.

**150
BISHOPS
AND CHURCH
LEADERS
WILL GATHER
FROM AROUND
THE WORLD**

What is an Extraordinary Synod?

A synod is a gathering of church leaders to make doctrinal and policy decisions. They are common to most Christian denominations. An Extraordinary Synod, however, is a rare event and specific to the Catholic Church. It can only be convened at the request of the pope, and focuses on an issue of immediate, critical concern to the church. Only two Extraordinary Synods have been convened previously.

Who Attends?

One hundred and fifty bishops and church leaders will gather from around the world to provide input on questions about family. The assembly includes presidents of national bishop conferences, leaders of the Eastern Catholic churches and heads of major Vatican offices.

Who is Represented? — Who is Not?

Views of church laity on family issues were to be collected by a survey the Vatican provided. It was meant to be distributed to people in the pews, but most U.S. bishops failed to widely distribute the survey to their communities. That means the bishops will head to the Extraordinary Synod without carrying the voice of the people, and will likely characterize their views as representative of a laity they never consulted.

Why Should We Care?

The Extraordinary Synod will address issues of profound importance to LGBT Catholics and their allies. While Catholic leadership has been unmoving, the Catholic laity has proven more progressive, often making a significant difference at the polls. One example: 71% of U.S. Catholics support marriage equality.

In addressing questions about the family, the Synod will also address issues of fertility, surrogate birth and contraception. The church currently dictates that "natural law" prevails in these areas, and strictly limits any measures taken in the shaping of families. In-vitro fertilization or surrogacy are seen as contrary to "natural law," and therefore are prohibited, as is gender transition.

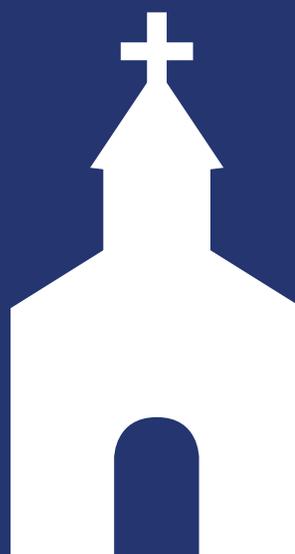
The U.S. Catholic laity is far ahead of the hierarchy in the desire for the church to be inclusive of LGBT people and women. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of Catholics favor laws that would protect gay and lesbian people against discrimination in the workplace; 63% of Catholics favor allowing gay and lesbian people to serve openly in the military; and 6 in 10 (60%) Catholics favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to adopt children. It is imperative that the body of the church — the people in the pews — be heard, by their bishops and by the pope himself.

What's the Goal?

The Extraordinary Synod will not result in the recognition of marriages between same-sex couples or in the ordination of women. Those issues are not on the table. However, church leaders may take steps toward greater inclusion, potentially securing the baptismal sacrament for children of LGBT Catholic families. Most important is the opportunity to create a precedent for change.

What's Being Done?

HRC is launching a tour titled *Pray, Listen, Discern — Raising the Voices of LGBT Catholics*. It takes two approaches: 1) Rosary vigils will be held in seven cities — Baltimore, Md.; Chicago, Ill.; Cincinnati, Ohio; San Francisco, Calif.; Springfield, Ill.; St. Paul, Minn.; and Philadelphia, Pa. The praying of the rosary will be followed by community events where information can be disseminated to the public and awareness heightened. 2) An outreach tour will build a clear picture of the deep commitment to faith shared by LGBT Catholics and the value of their inclusion in the church family.



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www.hrc.org/synod