



# The Synod on the Amazon

“Thus a Church called to be ever more synodal begins by listening to the peoples and to the earth, by coming into contact with the abundant reality of an Amazon full of life and wisdom but also of contrasts. It continues with the cry that is provoked by destructive deforestation and extractivist activities and that demands an integral ecological conversion.”

*-Working Document for the Synod of Bishops, #5*

In October 2019, a Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region will meet in Rome to discuss the theme “The Amazon: New paths for the Church and for integral ecology.”

## WHAT IS A SYNOD?

A synod is an assembly of Catholic bishops convened by the pope to discuss a particular issue. The last synod focused on young people.

A synod is an opportunity for the Church to conduct listening sessions with priests, the laity, and people within religious life such as sisters and brothers before the meeting. The fruits of these consultations influence the synod’s working document as well as discussions at the meeting. Each synod then produces a plan to implement its outcomes. The Amazon Synod is unique for the crucial role indigenous communities are playing in shaping the direction of this three-step process.

## WHY A SYNOD ON THE AMAZON?

Pope Francis announced a Synod on the Amazon in October 2017. A few months later, in January 2018, he visited the Peruvian Amazon and met with indigenous leaders. He expressed his sorrow over the exploitation of their lands for petroleum, gas, wood, gold, and forms of industrial agriculture, as well as for conservation measures that limit access to their ancestral homes. He also said it is “essential to begin creating institutional expressions of respect, recognition and dialogue with the native peoples, acknowledging and recovering their native cultures, languages, traditions, rights and spirituality.”

Pope Francis has called the Amazon region one of the “lungs of our planet.” It provides roughly twenty percent of the oxygen we breathe and the water we drink. It is the most biodiverse ecosystem in the world. The Amazon rainforest is also a critical carbon sink. The loss of the forest ecosystem will increase the speed and the impacts of climate change.

The region is home to nearly three million indigenous people from 390 ethnic groups who speak 240 languages, belonging to 49 linguistic families. This cultural diversity presents the Church with an opportunity to build a “Church with an Amazonian face,” one that responds to the needs and unique circumstance of the people that live there. The Amazon Synod highlights the importance of how marginalized communities, including creation, are at the center of God’s presence in history.

## THEMES OF THE SYNOD

- Listening to the experiences and wisdom of indigenous communities
- Responding to the ecological crisis
- Deepening interculturality as central to how the Church approaches mission in the world