

## SYNOD ON THE FAMILY: DOES IT CHANGE WHAT WE TEACH IN THE RCIA?



### A conversation with Deacon Bill Ditewig

Deacon Bill Ditewig, PhD, is former Executive Director of the Secretariat for the Diaconate at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and currently teaches theology at Santa Clara University. He retired from the Navy as a Commander in 1993 after having served for 22 years as a cryptologist and linguist. He is a contributing author for *From Vatican II to Pope Francis* and *Sick, And You Cared for Me: Homilies and Reflections for Cycle B*. Contact him at his blog, "[Deacons Today: Servants in a Servant Church.](#)"

#### 1. Why is the Synod on the Family important?

##### The family is the domestic church

- ⇒ Everyone needs stability and a sense of belonging
- ⇒ Families provide us with a home, a place to share the story of life
- ⇒ Families can be a place of good news, a place of evangelization
- ⇒ Even broken families and families in crisis can be a "privileged place for an encounter with Christ" (Pope Francis)

*"It is significant how—also in the individualist culture that distorts and renders bonds ephemeral—in every man born of woman there remains alive an essential need of stability, of an open door, of someone with whom to plan and share the story of life, a story to which one belongs."*

—Pope Francis, Discourse at Vigil of Prayer for the Extraordinary Synod on the Family ([link](#))

#### 2. What is the Synod on the Family?

##### A synod is a meeting of bishops around a current topic

- ⇒ The synod process was established by Pope Paul VI in 1965
- ⇒ A synod advises the pope
- ⇒ An ordinary synod is one that takes place on a regular schedule on a predetermined topic
- ⇒ An extraordinary synod is unusual and is called to deal with an urgent concern (this extraordinary synod is only the third ever called)
- ⇒ The Synod on the Family is a two-part process
  1. Extraordinary Synod
  2. Ordinary Synod

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### What happened and will happen?

#### Documents were presented

1. Preparatory Document (*lineamenta*)
2. Working Document (*instrumentum laboris*)
3. Midterm report of preliminary conclusions
4. Final report (*relatio*)
5. Closing address by the Pope

#### A more open process embraced

1. Participants were bishops, observers, experts, and married couples
2. Open debate vs. scripted presentations
3. Disagreements encouraged

#### At the Ordinary Synod on the Family (October, 2015)

1. Conclusions of the Extraordinary Synod used to create the working document for the Ordinary Synod
2. After Synod, Pope Francis will issue an exhortation



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### 3. How does the Synod impact what we teach in the RCIA ?

- ⇒ Don't fear discussion and possibility of change.
- ⇒ Disagree with love and respect.
- ⇒ Transparency is important.
- ⇒ All of us learn, even the Pope.
- ⇒ God surprises us.
- ⇒ Treat the symptoms and the causes of evil.

### 4. How will the Synod impact the lives of Catholic families?

- ⇒ Official teaching has not and likely won't change, but disciplines might.
- ⇒ Pope Francis calls us to be much more pastoral and much more flexible.
- ⇒ We must change the factors that keep families in poverty.