News
Religious Life



Brazilian Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, gestures at the start of the first session of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon on Oct. 7, 2019, at the Vatican. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Consecrated virgins, hermits and members of religious orders, individually and as communities, should take part in the consultations for the Synod of Bishops, because "to ensure that the synodal church is not a mirage, but rather a dream to be realized, it is necessary to dream together, to pray together and to work together," said Cardinal João Braz de Aviz.

The cardinal, prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, asked consecrated men and women to participate in the diocesan-level listening sessions scheduled to begin in October as the first step of preparation for the 2023 assembly of the Synod of Bishops discussing the theme, "For a synodal church: communion, participation and mission."

Pope Francis is scheduled to formally open the synod process Oct. 9-10 at the Vatican, the synod office said. And the bishop of every diocese should open the process in his diocese Oct. 17.

The diocesan phase will go through April 2022, featuring a consultation with local Catholics discussing a preparatory document and questionnaire that the synod office will send out along with guidelines for how the consultation should work.

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Writing to consecrated men and women, in a letter posted on the synod website in late July, Braz de Aviz said the synodal process can benefit from the "prophetic dimension" of consecrated life, its focus on communion with the church and its experience with discerning God's will.

"No one should feel excluded from this ecclesial journey," the cardinal said. "Various methods of participation will be possible, both on a personal and community level: the potential participation of individual consecrated men and women in the existing

local church structures, the drafting of a proposal formulated by the individual communities within a specific diocese [and] national or international input" from conferences of religious or religious superiors.

"Be open to the challenge offered by the three significant words of the theme of the Synod of Bishops on the synodal church: communion, participation and mission," the cardinal said. "Pray, reflect, discuss and share your experiences, insights and desires. Do it with the freedom of those who place their trust in God and are thus able to overcome timidity, a sense of inferiority or worse still, reproaches and complaints."

While "avoiding arrogance," he said, members of religious orders must have "a sense of co-responsibility" in the process, because all the baptized share in the mission of the church.