

Documents establishing the process and setting the rules for the 2023 Synod *For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission* are among the most solemn in the Church.

Document Type	Description
Apostolic Constitution	The most solemn, formal papal documents, on doctrine or disciplinary matters, published as the universal or particular law of the Church. Examples: <i>Munificentissimus Deus</i> (1950, Pius XII) on Assumption of Mary; <i>Lumen gentium</i> (a dogmatic constitution of the Church, 1964, Paul VI, Vatican II)
Encyclicals	Pastoral letters that clarify or explain some aspect of Catholic teaching, morals, or discipline. Usually addressed to bishops, they may also be addressed to all. Examples: <i>Humanae vitae</i> (1968, Paul VI), <i>Fratelli tutti</i> (2020, Francis)
<i>Motu Proprio</i>	Legislative, apostolic letter written and signed by pope on his own initiative, used for significant legislative matters that do not merit a Constitution. Relatively brief, they handle specific Church issues “at this time.” Examples: <i>Ecclesia dei</i> (July 1988, John Paul II), On transparency in public finances (April 2021, Francis)
Other Apostolic Letters	An “epistle” responding to a specific need or a specific group of people, pastoral in nature and not legislative or doctrinal
.Apostolic Exhortations	Papal reflections on a topic addressed to all clergy and all the faithful. First used by Pius XII in 1939. Aims to encourage a particular mission or virtue (such as Christian family); not legislative and not dogmatic.
Decretal Letters	Papal decisions on discipline and administration. Today, they typically are used for canonizations and solemn matters, and they are part of the pope’s <i>magisterium</i> but are not legislative.
Addresses (<i>Allocutiones</i>)	General category for less-formal comments and addresses by the pope that do not address Church law or liturgy.
Papal Rescript	A reply to a petition placed before a Curia office or the pope.
Apostolic Brief (<i>brevia</i>)	Short document on matters of relatively minor importance.