



On Sunday, Pope Francis announced the decision to hold a special assembly of the Synod of Bishops, to take place in October 2019, on the state of evangelization in the Pan-Amazon region of South America.

“Accepting the desire of some Catholic bishops' conferences in Latin America, as well as the voice of various pastors and faithful from other parts of the world, I have decided to convene a Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops,” Francis said Oct. 15.

The purpose of the assembly will be to “identify new paths for the evangelization” of people in the Pan-Amazon region of South America, meaning Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guyana, Guyana, Peru, Venezuela and Surinam, “especially the indigenous people, often forgotten,” he said.

The assembly will also address the “crisis of the Amazonian Forest, a lung of great importance to our planet.”

The Pope’s announcement was made in St. Peter’s Square before the recitation of the Angelus, and following the canonization Mass of 35 new saints.

New saints Andre de Soveral, Ambrosio Francisco Ferro, and Mateo Moreira and 27 companions were all martyred in Brazil. Three teenage boys, Cristobal, Antonio and Juan, also martyred, were from Mexico.

The other new saints are Faustino Miguez of Spain and Angelo of Acri, Italy.

“The new Saints will intercede for this ecclesial event, so that, in respect for the beauty of creation, all the peoples of the earth may praise God, Lord of the universe, and enlightened by him walk on the paths of justice and peace,” Francis stated.

Serving as an advisory body to the Pope, the Synod of Bishops was established by Pope Paul VI in 1965 by the motu proprio *Apostolica sollicitudo* to “strengthen (the Pope’s) union” with other bishops and to “establish even closer ties” with them.

It consists of a group of bishops from around the world who meet every three years “to foster closer unity between the Roman Pontiff and bishops, to assist the Roman Pontiff with their counsel...and to consider questions pertaining to the activity of the Church in the world,” according to canon law.

The Synod of Bishops may meet for ordinary general assemblies, which are on a matter of importance to the Church in general and held at fixed intervals, or for special assemblies, which focus on a specific geographical area of the Church. Extraordinary general assemblies can also be organized in the case of an urgent matter.

The last special assembly of the Synod of Bishops was held in 2010 on the situation in the Middle East.

The 50th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is set to take place in October 2018, and will discuss “Young People, the Faith and the Discernment of Vocation.”

The last Synod of Bishops was dedicated to the family and took place in two parts, the first being an Extraordinary Synod in 2014, which was followed by the Ordinary Synod in 2015 that drew 279 cardinals, bishops and representatives from all over the world to discuss the challenges and blessings of family life.