



AUSTRALIAN
CATHOLIC BISHOPS
CONFERENCE

SYNOD OF BISHOPS

Australian Synthesis



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
▪ The experience of the Synod consultations	2
On Synodality.....	3
▪ Commitment to the synodal path— <i>with Christ and towards Christ</i>	3
▪ Journeying with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples	3
▪ Fruits of synodality	3
▪ Synodality needed at all levels in the diocese.....	3
▪ Concrete actions must follow synodal processes	4
Key Themes on Communion.....	5
▪ Love for the Church	5
▪ Deepening community life	5
▪ More faith formation and spirituality	5
▪ Importance of liturgy to faith	6
▪ Greater listening and speaking.....	6
Key Themes on Participation.....	7
▪ Welcoming and inclusive.....	7
▪ Leadership, formation and governance	7
▪ Involvement of diverse groups in decision-making.....	8
Key Themes on Mission	9
▪ Commitment to social justice and care of the Earth.....	9
▪ Accompaniment	9
▪ Welfare, education and those on the edge.....	9
▪ Ecumenism and interfaith relations	9
▪ Evangelisation.....	10
▪ Co-responsibility.....	10
Conclusion	11
Appendix A: About the Catholic Church in Australia.....	13
Appendix B: Australian Resources.....	14

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Introduction

▪ The Synod of Bishops process in Australia

1. The official Opening of the Synod of Bishops in the local Churches took place on Sunday 17 October 2021 in dioceses across the country. A national working committee was established to assist the implementation of the Synod of Bishops process in the dioceses and by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC). As well as assisting with the development of Synod resources, the working committee oversaw the work of the ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPD), which provided national coordination for the Australian Synod of Bishops processes.
2. In its national coordination role, the NCPD assisted dioceses in preparing for the Synod with the adoption of widespread consultations using various resources and processes. A suite of resources, including Listening and Discernment Group Guides and an Individual Reflection Guide, were distributed and made available on the Synod website designed for use by groups and individuals, respectively wishing to participate in the consultation.
3. In accordance with the proposal directives for the Synod, most local Churches appointed a 'Diocesan Contact Person' and a small team to coordinate the activities in each diocese. Weekly emails were sent to the diocesan teams by the NCPD to communicate progress, advise them of process updates and facilitate the exchange of additional resources.
4. An online submission portal, open from mid-October 2021 to the end of February 2022, allowed individuals (aged 16+) and groups across Australia to submit the fruits of consultation from the diocesan phase. During this same period, local Churches were encouraged to hold such consultations, with a record of the fruits of the consultations recorded locally and provided to the NCPD through the portal.
5. The Synod of Bishops process in Australia occurred in conjunction with the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, with the schedule of events and activities synchronised to allow each process to unfold appropriately. Many Synod questions had already been raised during the diocesan pre-Plenary Council consultations. The discussions that arose within these areas, questions that were raised and experiences of people were outlined in the *Final Report for the Plenary Council Phase I: Listening and Dialogue*. For the Synod of Bishops diocesan consultation therefore, dioceses were encouraged to use the relevant material from the Plenary Council group and individual submissions to avoid repetitive discussions. Some dioceses also integrated the feedback received from other synodal processes concurrently operating within the diocese at the time of the Synod consultation. Another important source of feedback was the responses made by young people during the consultation for the *2018 Synod of Bishops XV Ordinary General Assembly*.
6. Between mid-March and the end of March 2022, submissions made through the online portal were collated by the NCPD, and a report prepared for each diocese. This report included the complete text of submissions from individuals and groups located in the diocese, along with a brief diocesan summary of the respondents' demographics. Consultations also continued locally during this period, through diocesan and parish meetings.
7. During the period between 19 April and 16 May 2022, pre-synodal meetings were held in each local Church as the culmination of the diocesan discernment. In early May, each local Church submitted its final diocesan contribution to the NCPD. Reports were also received from Catholic Religious Australia and the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons. These were sent to all bishops to begin the process of drafting and finalising the Australian synthesis, which occurred over three meetings of the bishops, held via videoconference between 25 May and 15 June 2022.

▪ The experience of the Synod consultations

8. There was a great divergence of views expressed in the submissions across and within the dioceses. Some participants preferred a more traditional approach to the Church and others, a more modern approach. There was great optimism and hope shared, while at the same time, in other areas, frustration and sadness.
9. Some groups were greatly appreciative of the synodal process and were grateful for the opportunity to have their voices heard and be recognised as important for the future of their diocese and the Church at large. There was a great passion expressed in these submissions and a willingness expressed to move forward, being open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
10. There were concerns from a few groups about the Church's intentions behind the design of the Plenary Council and Synod processes and from others, about the lack of participation by parish and Church agency personnel. Others observed that having had two consultation processes back-to-back—the Plenary Council and the Synod of Bishops—resulted in 'survey fatigue' or 'consultation weariness'. Also, since the outcomes of the first process were yet to be actioned and implemented, there was a sense of a 'loss of faith' in the synodal journey expressed among some groups. Still others expressed fear and uncertainty about their place in the Church and its future.
11. There was ongoing reference to the impact of the clergy sexual abuse crisis and the Church's response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. For many, the aftermath of this is still a powerful, unresolved issue. There was a strong urgency to acknowledge the horror and damage, and to strengthen efforts to safeguard the vulnerable, repair damage to the moral authority of the Church and rebuild trust. Some dioceses reported that participants wished for them publicly to acknowledge and atone for past abuses.
12. Overall, there was a need to recognise and acknowledge the 'signs of the times', to be more energised, more willing to listen, able to acknowledge past failings, humbler and to bring healing and be more faithful to Gospel values. Some areas for change were recognised as being women in leadership and in all ministries; professional development for laity and clergy, including bishops; leadership within dioceses and parishes; and lay people in all areas of ministry. People voiced the need for courage for the Church to move forward on mission.
13. It was generally acknowledged that COVID-19 has accelerated change in many areas. It was no longer possible to continue doing the same thing. However, while the impact of COVID-19 was disruptive and tiring, it had also allowed new ideas to emerge around formation, sacraments and the mission of parishes in their communities.
14. The nature of consultations through surveys and group discussions generally favours respondents who are well-educated, more affluent members of the Church and those who are keen to make their opinions known. During the Plenary Council processes, it was noted that there were people and groups in the community whose voices were missed. While attempts were made to identify and contact them during the Synod consultation process, many important, necessary and valuable voices have been yet left unheard. The Church in Australia continues to strive to find ways through which these voices can be incorporated into our collective listening to the 'sense of the faithful'.

On Synodality

▪ Commitment to the synodal path—*with Christ and towards Christ*

15. The experience of synodality in Australia has been ongoing since the journey towards the Plenary Council commenced. There was a general sense in the Synod submissions, therefore, of dioceses and people being committed to the synodal path, at the heart of which was a journeying together with Christ and towards Christ—‘the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of our journeying’. And as one diocese noted, ‘We may not always get it right, but we believe this is the way of being Church that the Holy Spirit is leading us to’. There was great support for synodal practices to be developed in all areas of diocesan life. It was noted that to be successful, this practice required buy-in and commitment from the leadership (lay and ordained alike) and the inclusion of all voices, especially those on the margins. Parishes, diocesan agencies and ministries which practise greater synodality experience a journey of transformation and cultural change.

▪ Journeying with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

16. Within the Catholic Church in Australia, our synodal journey with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is vitally important to moving towards unity in faith. Indigenous communities are growing, and people in these communities continue to have a great love for the Church despite many negative experiences. There is a continued need to acknowledge, accept and recognise past failings and the inter-generational trauma that exists, and to complement this with a deliberate welcoming into parish communities and practical support for people with health and wellbeing issues. There is also a need to consider new ways of being Christian and new forms of Church life better suited to First Nations cultures.

▪ Fruits of synodality

17. With their previous experiences of listening and dialogue, participants in the Plenary Council and Synod processes were able to articulate several ways members of the faith community experienced an authentic ‘walking together’. Some dioceses noted that the fruits of synodality were already being seen, particularly through the Diocesan Pastoral Council and other diocesan assemblies. This brought great hope to people for the Church’s mission to spread the good news of Christ. Similarly, some parishes and communities are also growing in this practice through the Parish Pastoral Council and other assemblies.
18. In other dioceses, where the practice of synodality was still in its early stages, the renewal of the Diocesan Pastoral Council was seen to be particularly important, along with its impact of demonstrating the practice of working together. Other areas for improvement that were identified included a shared responsibility and openness in the management of parish and diocesan resources, an end to clericalism, and greater shared authority.
19. Religious communities noted that their congregations, through conscious, deliberate effort over time, have intentionally shaped their leadership processes to better reflect the spirit and practice of synodality. In a highly fractured society, these communities demonstrate that it is possible and beneficial to live and minister together harmoniously, despite differences in age, culture and viewpoints.

▪ Synodality needed at all levels in the diocese

20. The practice of synodality being ‘at the centre of everything we seek and do’ was reiterated throughout several submissions. Many proposals towards a more synodal Church community were received. Some were simple and practical, e.g. parish picnics, retreats and welcoming each other before Mass. Others required substantial planning, e.g. a diocesan synod.

21. Several dioceses indicated that new initiatives towards synodality had been established, for example:
- By creating an understanding of co-responsibility in mission among the leaders in the parish, Catholic schools, CatholicCare and social service agencies, and chaplaincy.
 - By employing a synodal process to examine structures and practices that enable expressions of our shared Baptism, marked by inclusivity and participation.

▪ **Concrete actions must follow synodal processes**

22. There was consensus that synodal consultations needed to be followed by action. People were waiting to see if their voices had been heard and if their recommendations had been taken on board. Others had strong views about the relationship of the listening exercise to the decision-making end of the process. A recommendation was made for the key themes that emerged from this formal synodal process to be followed by action. Given that syntheses documents naturally include divergent positions, it was noted that subsequent actions needed to include explanations of why some suggestions could be implemented, while others were not possible within the faith tradition. It was also noted that the bishops' responses ought to be guided by *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.31 to promote authentic missionary communion in every diocese.

Key Themes on Communion

▪ Love for the Church

23. There was a recognition that many people have a great love for the Church. Many people provided stories of deep connection to the Church and strong relations with priests, religious and other members. They valued past experiences and look back fondly on them. Some yearned for a return to the 'old days', though most recognised that this was not possible, and therefore they looked forward in hope to the Church of the future.

▪ Deepening community life

24. People were concerned about community life, especially in parishes, where this has been greatly impacted by COVID-19. People generally valued friendship and hospitality and wanted to belong to a community where people loved and supported each other. There was particular need voiced for a deeper sense of community to be developed, stronger relationships to be built between the parish school and worshipping communities, and for families to be supported so that they, in turn, could reshape their parishes. Many dioceses provided a range of examples of programs, initiatives and activities that helped deepen community. Others advocated for a community that inspires people and encourages involvement and opportunities.
25. Although the Catholic community in Australia, especially in urban settings, is increasingly multicultural, in some parishes with multi-ethnic groups, reaching out to and engaging with migrants in each of these groups was particularly important, as was the need to promote mutual acceptance, ongoing dialogue and integration into the local Church.
26. There was concern voiced about the difficulty of finding ways to engage with and listen to those who are disconnected and alienated. Many expected 'the Church' to do this but did not recognise that, as baptised members, all are called to be missionary disciples, to reach out to, and be inclusive of those on the margin. Some people had difficulty in accepting people who were different from them, while others were frustrated by what they perceived as the rigidity of Church teachings.
27. There was a desire expressed to allow and support diverse models of Catholic community to emerge, as possible ways in which the Gospel might light the spark of faith within people. There was a sense that where Communion was developed, Participation and Mission soon followed.

▪ More faith formation and spirituality

28. There was a desire expressed to grow in the faith more deeply. People voiced their fears about feeling, at times, unequal to the task of communicating their beliefs to others and being vulnerable in the face of criticism and contested values in the public square. Many people felt the need for greater direction in faith formation and spiritual development, especially through training, resources and support for all ages. Requests were made for a richer understanding of the four-fold real presence of Christ in the Mass (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n.7)—in the assembly gathered in Christ's name, in the person of the ordained minister, in the Word proclaimed and preached, and 'indeed substantially and uninterruptedly under the Eucharistic species' (*General Instruction of The Roman Missal*, n.27). Others wanted to grow and develop as a real community of disciples. Those who had experienced education and formation underpinned by sound theology and Scripture, felt nurtured in their faith as they exercised the mission arising from their Baptism.
29. One recommendation made was for adult formation to become a priority in the Church, focusing on what the Church believes, why it believes it, and how these beliefs interface with a pluralistic society. Authentic faith formation needed to be grounded in the person of Jesus and inspired by the Holy Spirit. It was also noted that formation needed to distinguish between elements of the faith that are essential and unchangeable, compared with those aspects of the tradition that may be developed further. There was a move to work towards becoming a Church filled with people in relationship with Christ who could

authentically witness to God's love in a broken and hurting world. Formation was also sought for leadership and mission opportunities and for intercultural learning.

30. Another need was for catechesis for young people that was vibrant, family-based and relevant to the current society, while acknowledging that this formation needed to primarily take place within the family. Some acknowledged that while young people wrestled with certain aspects of Church teaching and practice, there was a general love for the faith that needed to be supported.

▪ Importance of liturgy to faith

31. There was widespread acceptance of the importance of liturgy to faith and the need for unity in the community to be fostered through the proclamation of the Gospel in beautiful and meaningful liturgy. It was widely acknowledged that creative, inclusive and welcoming liturgy that highlighted the sense of the sacred and reflected the community's diversity strengthens the communion of the faithful in their mission. However, there was recognition of the reality that most Catholics do not attend Sunday Mass on a regular basis, for a multiplicity of reasons. Many people were identified who longed for life-giving, faith-supporting celebrations with the opportunity to share their faith, and to heal and build community relationships.
32. There were recommendations made for dioceses to provide greater opportunities for the Catholic community to gather in prayer and the celebration of the Sacraments. Some calls were made for the extension and broader use of the Third Rite of Reconciliation. Recommendations were also made for improving liturgies, although there were differences in what this might actually mean. A call was made for new liturgical music to be produced that resonated with particular cultures, and for inclusive language to be used. There was a desire that lay people be empowered and formed in all areas of lay liturgical engagement.
33. In dioceses with a greater presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, a yearning was expressed for greater recognition and use of Indigenous spirituality in liturgy and Church life – both in the diocese and the wider Church in Australia.

▪ Greater listening and speaking

34. With the experience of the Plenary Council and the Synod consultations, people have become familiar with the practice of prayerful listening and dialogue. A need for people to speak with courage was identified, but the reality was recognised that, for those who gather each week for Sunday Mass, few opportunities are available to practise this.
35. Dioceses recognised that clergy have a key role to play in listening to the laity, especially where they have been engaged in ongoing consultation and have expressed their voices on key concerns. However, in contrast, some Eastern dioceses recognised the need for laity to speak up and be more proactive, especially in matters where they had sufficient knowledge and experience, and the ability to participate actively in the Church.
36. There was a need expressed for the Church to have a strong media presence and role to address the challenges it faced with laws that are inimical to the teachings of the Christian faith. Many recognised that the voices of the faithful were being disregarded in the passing of parliamentary bills on issues such as abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage, and felt the need for more Christians to get involved in the public sphere to influence policy decisions wherever possible.

Key Themes on Participation

▪ Welcoming and inclusive

37. There was a particular sense that synodality is about welcoming and including all, particularly those on the fringes of the Church and on the margins of society. Such groups include Indigenous Australians, migrants and refugees, women, those of different sexual orientations, and the poor and vulnerable. In some instances, the Church was seen as placing barriers of exclusion by its teachings and the application of those teachings. On the other hand, some called for the Church to be more compassionate while remaining authentic to its teachings.
38. More inclusiveness was also called for to welcome back to the Eucharistic community those who had left the Church, those who felt discriminated against and those who felt unwelcome because of seemingly restrictive Church teachings. Instead of 'talking at' those who no longer feel welcome, there was a desire for the Church to be 'walking with' them, expressing inclusiveness through respectful listening and dialogue.
39. There was a call to encourage and equip parishes to strive to be authentically welcoming and inclusive communities, to enable ongoing conversion for all who meet through Christ-centred engagement and genuine friendships.
40. There was consideration that by welcoming and including those on the margins, the Church was respecting and supporting diversity, which ought to be seen as part of the Catholic tradition. There was recognition that people in these diverse groups had gifts and experiences to offer that the Church could support and encourage.
41. While there was much disappointment about decreasing engagement of the faithful in parishes and a sense of exclusivity experienced by some, there was also a love for the Church and hope and longing that the Church could reach out and reconnect in a synodal way with those who no longer engaged in a parish community.

▪ Leadership, formation and governance

42. There was strong emphasis that lay and ordained need to be involved in all levels of leadership, and that Gospel-inspired models of servant leadership should be pursued. Leadership should foster synodality by encouraging involvement to ensure a diversity of gifts enriched the Church. Clergy, religious and laity, collectively journeying together in mission, could foster vibrant, life-giving and synodal parishes.
43. There was a call for greater and ongoing formation in leadership and governance for lay, religious, seminarians and clergy. This included forming seminarians and new clergy to work synodally in their parishes, which would contribute to reducing issues of clericalism, widely regarded as a barrier to synodality. Ongoing and intentional formation in theology, spirituality and leadership needed to be encouraged and open to all.
44. There was a desire for pathways to pastoral ministry for lay people to be clear, accessible and encouraged. Spiritual and pastoral formation of lay people was seen as a priority as more and more lay people took up leadership roles.
45. For many people in parishes and dioceses, the limitations on the role of women in leadership constituted an obstacle to greater synodality and this issue needed urgent attention. There was a desire among many that women—lay and religious—needed to be given greater opportunity and empowerment for leadership positions, including in parishes. There was also a desire for ongoing discussion about the ordination of women and a need for greater clarity around the consideration of women for diaconate roles.
46. Greater collaboration among lay, clergy and religious was urgently sought, but also greater encouragement and support for parish priests was needed. As part of the synodal process, there needed to be openness to transformational leadership which lives out the mission of the Church more authentically.

47. There was a call to address the shortage of parish priests, particularly Australian-born priests. Further discussion was sought around ordination, including priestly celibacy, vocations to ordained ministry and consecrated life, the recruitment of clergy from overseas and the assistance of priests from other Australian dioceses. There was a strong call for further reflection on investigating innovative models of training and formation for seminarians, clergy and pastoral supervisors to ensure they developed pastoral and other ministry skills relevant to the contemporary Church in Australia.
48. For parishes and dioceses to continue to grow in synodality, there was a special need to ensure that governance structures and roles were clearly defined and refined as required. Pastoral or leadership councils needed to ensure collaboration between clergy and laity, with membership being truly representative of the parish. One notable way in which collaboration in governance was experienced on a national level was through the working of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference with Catholic Religious Australia and the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons.

▪ **Involvement of diverse groups in decision-making**

49. While the hierarchical model of decision-making in the Catholic Church can be beneficial, it is recognised that it can also have negative implications which can be the antithesis of synodality. More diversity in discernment and decision-making was called for, which would encompass diversity in age, background and specialisation for representation on decision-making bodies, such as pastoral councils.
50. In all areas of the Church, there was a desire for greater confidence that decision-making processes would be inclusive, transparent, responsible and accountable. The actions of those making the decisions needed to reflect synodal values, which would lead to greater synodality. There was a need to ensure all voices were heard and respected in decision-making.

Key Themes on Mission

▪ Commitment to social justice and care of the Earth

51. In many dioceses, there was a call for missional activities at all levels of the Church to include discussion and engagement in social justice, political and environmental initiatives.
52. People voiced an urgent need for commitments from the Church to care for the environment alongside affirmative action to care for the most vulnerable affected by climate change.
53. Input identified that more support was required for those working in the community in the areas of social justice and human rights, not just for Catholics or those working for the Catholic Church, but for everyone working to create a just society.
54. All Catholics were urged to become involved in political action and play a greater role in influencing policy-makers at all levels of governments to make appropriate moral decisions.

▪ Accompaniment

55. There was a strong need for accompaniment of specific groups, such as children, families, young people and immigrants.
56. A significant call was made from many areas for greater involvement and support of young people and families in the life of the Church. Family members were called to encourage one another to journey together in synodality as they sought to fulfil God's purpose for their own lives, in their families and in the communities in which they are a part.
57. There was also a need for acknowledgement, encouragement and development of a culture in which all the baptised are called to be missionary disciples.

▪ Welfare, education and those on the edge

58. Through their outreach to various groups, many Catholic agencies and schools in Australia are already acknowledged as concrete expressions of synodal living. There was a need for the Church in Australia to continue to work and support these agencies and schools to bring about a more equitable and compassionate society.
59. A call was made for more rigorous and effective Catholic education through schools, particularly in the area of religious education, and for more encouragement for Catholics, both within and beyond the parish communities, to engage in service to those on the margins.

▪ Ecumenism and interfaith relations

60. There was a strong sense that the Catholic Church needed to reach out to those from the other Christian traditions to further their own understanding of synodality. Making such connections involved engaging with each other in ecumenical dialogue and walking together on a similar journey. Such engagement would allow relevant learnings to be shared and integrated into a Catholic context.
61. There needs to be ongoing cooperation with other Christian churches, particularly those in the same area, to identify opportunities for greater collaboration.
62. There was a need for more openness to, and better formation for, strengthened interfaith relations.

▪ Evangelisation

63. It was noted that, rather than expecting people to 'come in', all Catholics were called to reach out to people as part of the mission of the Church and to seek ways of spreading the Good News to the wider community and 'meet people where they are at'. As a missionary community of faith, there needs to be a sense of dynamism and intentionality in this call to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the Australian people.
64. Evangelisation is the responsibility and call of all the baptised. There was a strong call for a culture of evangelisation to be encouraged in traditional ministries and new and emerging areas of mission. Through personal encounters with the Holy Spirit, the faithful were called to witness to the love of Jesus and a love of neighbour. An acknowledgement was made of new ecclesial communities who provide formation for individuals and families in the work of evangelisation.
65. Many dioceses voiced the need for evangelisation to be undertaken synodally, as a collaborative partnership of people working for the common good and shared mission between the parish, diocese and wider society.
66. Religious communities noted that in the current context of a secularised society, without much appreciation for consecrated life, they continued to persist in mission—to pray, love, speak and serve. In synodal terms, they continued to 'walk the path' together and to give life to others.

▪ Co-responsibility

67. It was widely considered that the mission of the Church is the responsibility of all Catholics. There was a need expressed for greater collaboration between all levels of the Church as well as greater opportunities for and empowerment of the laity. This collaboration was seen as a synodal process, one which needed to be inclusive of all the baptised, fostered by parish and diocesan leadership.
68. There was desire that the gifts and charisms of lay people, flowing from their Baptism, be highly valued and utilised in the service to the Church and in the wider community. Some groups were identified as requiring special attention to share responsibility for the Church's mission. These included young people, those on the fringes of the Church, and women.
69. There was recognition that the proclamation of the Good News of Christ was enriched when there was inclusion of diversity and difference. Many felt there ought to be a common understanding of what is essential for the maintenance of the Church and what should boldly be 'let go of' for the sake of the Church's mission in contemporary Australia.

Conclusion

70. The synodal path calls each person to be an intentional disciple of Jesus Christ which requires a deepening conversion of heart through the working of the Holy Spirit. All are called to grow in synodality so that they may all walk together on the journey to Christ. And as the *Vademecum* noted, ‘walking together is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist’.
71. In many ways, a number of people journeying through the Synod process encountered the three stages of the Emmaus story:
 - The disciples walking together, talking and yet downcast, despondent, without the Lord Jesus.
 - The disciples walking together, talking with Jesus, gaining hope, inviting Him to stay, recognising Him in the breaking of Bread (Eucharist).
 - The disciples sent on and energised from the Eucharistic encounter with the Lord.

Others are still along the way...

72. The Synod consultation highlighted many ‘lights and shadows’ present in people’s experience of the Church today and respondents voiced a strong need for the Church to be a missionary and Eucharistic community, inclusive of all, especially those on the margins. In the aftermath of COVID-19 and being strongly aware of being a ‘Church on the margins’ in Australian society, this new context calls the People of God to grow ‘our Church’ in unprecedented times. Some recommendations for this include communicating the Word of God to future generations in language that they can use in the Australian community, continuing to work for a more just, compassionate and equal world, and being ever welcoming to people of different age-groups and backgrounds who are searching for relevance and inclusion and, in the end, are searching for Christ.
73. The Church in Australia recently concluded the celebration of its Fifth Plenary Council with the Second General Assembly. From the beginning of the five-year journey, the process sought to be synodal. In the concluding Assembly, it was agreed that a ‘Roundtable’ would be established to foster and promote the synodality of the Church nationally—in dioceses and parishes and other areas, including Catholic social and community services, health, and education. The bishops had already decided that each diocese would conduct a diocesan synod within five years of the Plenary Council concluding, and this decision was endorsed by the Plenary Council. What therefore began as a synodal journey of national significance will be enhanced by the fruits of the forthcoming Synod of Bishops and enriched by diocesan synods to be held in the years ahead.

Appendices

Appendix A: About the Catholic Church in Australia

▪ Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

The Catholic Church in Australia is comprised of 28 geographical dioceses, seven of which are designated as archdioceses. There are also five Eastern-Rite eparchies and two ordinariates, each of which covers all of Australia, and beyond in some cases. The bishops, eparchs and ordinaries all meet twice a year, work together on 11 episcopal commissions and are supported by a range of advisory councils.

▪ Religious Institutes

There are around 175 religious institutes and groups known as Institutes of Consecrated Life or Societies of Apostolic Life. Members of the institutes live in community and adhere to a way of life under vows. Most are governed according to their own constitutions, but in some cases by the local bishop. They work in a diocese with the consent of the local bishop.

▪ Public Juridic Persons

Some religious institutes have transferred their ministries, such as schools, hospitals or aged care, to new public juridic persons (PJPs)—entities established in canon law with a specific function, in this instance for ministries. As these new entities have responsibility for Church ministries, they are often known as ‘ministerial’ public juridic persons to distinguish them from traditional PJPs.

▪ A Snapshot of the Catholic Church in Australia

The total number of Catholics in Australia in 2021 was 5,075,907. Catholics made up 20.0 per cent of the total population.

In comparison, in 2016:

- The total number of Catholics in Australia was 5,291,834.
- Catholics made up 22.6 per cent of the total population
- The median age of Catholics was 40 years
- Catholics aged 0-14 made up 19.8 per cent of the Catholic population
- Catholics aged 65 and over made up 16.6 per cent of the Catholic population
- There were 1,997,833 Catholic families (where one or more members were Catholic)
- 73.6 per cent of Catholics were born in Australia
- 24.7 per cent of Catholics were born overseas
- Of all Catholics aged 15 and over, 20.6 per cent had a university degree
- The average weekly attendance at Mass was 623,356
- On an average weekend, around 11.8 per cent of all Catholics attended Mass

Appendix B: Australian Resources

To assist participation from groups and individuals, the NCPR and the working group developed a set of resources that is available on the Australian website for the Synod of Bishops: <https://www.catholic.org.au/synodalchurch>. Some of the most useful ones are:

1. **A suite of Listening and Discernment Adult Guides (Sessions 1-3):** These group resources were based on the three dimensions of the Synod: Communion, Participation and Mission. They included the Synod questions within each area and incorporated the process of Spiritual Conversation recommended for this reflection.
2. **An Individual Reflection Guide:** This guide was based on Lectio Divina and was intended for use by individuals who wish to participate in the consultation process.
3. **Questions for Reflection:** This document elaborated the three dimensions of the Synod, explained the ten themes and listed the questions within each theme. The list of questions was translated into various languages: Arabic, Croatian, Filipino, Italian, Malayalam, Polish and Spanish, and these multilingual guides were made available on the website.
4. **'Coffee Conversation' Trifold Brochure:** This document was a ready-to-use list of Synod questions that was distributed to attenders after Mass to facilitate informal conversations.
5. **Christmas card campaign:** Special Synod resources were created to encourage participation in parishes over Christmas. These included ready-to-use and editable versions of Christmas cards inviting the parishioners to the consultation process, and ready-to-use Christmas posters.

In addition to these, the following resources were also made available on the website:

- The Synod of Bishops prayer (A4 and A5 versions)
- Link to the Prayer in languages other than English
- The Synod of Bishops logo
- Links to the Official Synod of Bishops website
- Links to Australian media articles

In addition to the resources on the website, a number of other resources were shared with the diocesan contacts. They included:

- A resource published by The US Leadership Roundtable for Diocesan Facilitators
- Relevant documents from the International Theological Commission (Vatican)
- Resources made available by the General Secretariat of Synod of Bishops, including posters, poster templates, a social media toolkit, and a communication toolkit, to create promotional material for diocesan social media campaigns
- Resources that were originally created for the Australian Plenary Council but had content which was very relevant for this journey of Synodality.

Lastly, several international resources maintained on the Synod Secretariat's Google Drive were shared with diocesan contacts.



Synod
2021
2023

For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

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