

Consultation Summary Diocese of Cairns



The Consultation Process

Invitations to participate in a diocesan consultation event were sent to leaders of diocesan agencies and all clergy. Additionally, parish priests were asked to invite key members of their parish. Thirty-eight people from across the diocese accepted the invitation and were provided with the Synthesis Report from the first session of the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops as prereading.

The consultation meeting was held on March 9th from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Thirty people attended the meeting in person and eight attended via Zoom from across all three deaneries. The majority of participants were tertiary educated and were an equal mix of men and women.

The process throughout the consultation meeting followed the reflection guide provided by the National Centre for Pastoral Research. Participants were spread across eight tables with each table's discussion facilitated by a group leader, in accordance with the reflection guide. The consultation focused on sections 8, 11, 14, 16, 17 & 18 of the Synthesis Report.

Group discussion notes and suggestions were collected at the end of the meeting and collated for the purpose of this report. Participants were provided with a further opportunity to offer their reflections in a post-event survey. 12 survey responses were received. One additional email with suggestion (included herein) was received from a parishioner who was unable to attend the consultation meeting.

General Comments

Several groups voiced their sense that the Synthesis Report is written in 'Church Language' and would be inaccessible to many churchgoers. Even for a group of predominantly tertiary-trained people it was challenging to read and comprehend. Another concern raised was that commentary throughout the Synthesis Report reflects constructs that do not

represent the society in which we live. The one-dimensional concept of family, for example, does not represent the breadth of 'family' in 21st century Australia.

Summary of Submissions Grouped by Themes

Hope

Hope for the future was affirmed with multiple references to good things being done by good people with hope and love in partnership throughout the Diocese.

Lay Participation

A recurring theme that was heard throughout group discussions is that the laity are wasted and not listened to. Participants would like to see:

- Purposeful and meaningful lay participation at all levels of diocesan decision making.
- The gifts and talents of lay people recognised, welcomed and nurtured.
- Formation for all the baptised that is ongoing, regular and accessible. Formation should be integral to the everyday functioning of parishes. Resources should consider the busyness of people's lives by including digital platforms and 'bite-sized' sessions.
- Formation that is targeted toward the 'average Mass-goer'.
- Formation that addresses the co-responsibility for mission shared by laity, priests and deacons working together, understanding our shared and differential roles and responsibilities.
- Strong leadership that strives to include the diverse cross-sections of our community, including youth, First Nations people, refugees, migrants, families, the homeless and other marginalised groups.

Clergy

Participants reported a sense that 'clericalism' still exists across parishes, and people who want to help are not being heard. Groups were concerned that priests and deacons are viewed as the only source of spiritual nourishment, yet don't always have the skills and/or capacity to fill this role.

Several areas of clergy formation were deemed essential:

- Servant leadership
- Cultural understanding
- Interpersonal skills

Group feedback stated that accountability and transparency should be embedded into the roles and responsibilities of priests and deacons. Participant's comments recognise that

the behaviour and performance of priests and deacons is fundamental to the ongoing viability of parishes.

It was also noted that parish structures should be reviewed as the number of priests and vocations dwindle.

Structures and Processes

Accountability

Participants wrote that Diocesan Pastoral Plans should be developed, enacted, reviewed, and reported on with outcomes clearly identified and parishes required to participate. Current structures do not easily facilitate this.

Many participants expressed a desire to reinstate the practice of holding Diocesan Synod Sessions, as occurred between 2008 – 2016. It was felt that this practice would enhance the accountability, co-responsibility and transparency of diocesan leaders.

Pastoral Councils

Participant responses called for several key components of parish pastoral council renewal:

- Pastoral councils need a review of their purpose and role in organizational and pastoral matters.
- Clarity is sought regarding how these councils intersect with each other and with other ministries within the diocese and parish, including understanding their obligatory nature.
- Pastoral councils should be an essential component of parish structures.
- Pastoral councils should be responsible for planning and delivering formation activities and should be resourced accordingly.

Ministries

Participants reported that there are many lay people in our parishes who would like to lead ministries if given the opportunity, formation, and encouragement. It was recommended that ministries be many and varied, lay-led and shared collaboratively between parishes and across the diocese. It was observed that leadership training was needed so that ministries are not dependent on one or two key people. Agencies such as CentacareFNQ and Catholic Education should be better integrated within parish and diocesan ministries.

Participants would like to see ministries established to serve the following groups: youth, women, men, young families, grandparents, refugees, First Nations people, and the elderly.

In addition, participants would like needs-based ministries established for people who are sick, people experiencing poverty, families of recently deceased, families who have

children engaged in preparation for the sacraments of initiation, ministry to those not currently engaged in parish, ministries of welcome and hospitality, and ministries that foster Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Catholic Schools

Participants sought clarity and further exploration around the role of Catholic schools in engaging with students and their families.

Key Points

- Lay people have skills and talents that should be recognised and nurtured for the good of the entire church community.
- Lay people should be represented at all levels of diocesan leadership and decision making structures.
- The provision by the diocese of opportunities for formation is essential.
- Formation for clergy needs to be ongoing and include real-world skills such as leadership and interpersonal skills.
- Accountability and transparency should be visibly embedded into the roles and responsibilities of clergy.
- Diocesan Pastoral Plans should be developed, enacted, reviewed and reported on with outcomes clearly identified and parishes required to follow.