



## Diocese of Cairns Synod 2025-2026

### Preamble

In the past six months, since I took up my appointment as Bishop of the Diocese of Cairns, I have visited each of its regions in all their diversity. While I have not yet visited every parish and school, I have spent considerable time around Cairns itself in the southern and northern areas of this most populated region of the diocese. I have also had numerous visits to the Atherton Tablelands and to the southern coastal areas of the diocese from Cardwell to Babinda. In addition, I have visited remote communities in the Gulf and Savannah region, Cape York and the Torres Strait.

Those visits have opened me to see something of both the strengths and the needs of our various communities.

I have also had the opportunity over these months to work closely with our priests and deacons, with our diocesan finance, planning and pastoral teams and with our key agencies serving the social welfare and Catholic education needs of the diocese.

I have been deeply impressed by the faith, resilience and warmth that I have encountered amongst the clergy, the staff of our agencies and all the faithful.

I have also observed some areas where we face challenges that if addressed well, promise to open new opportunities for pastoral vitality and missionary growth.

In a diocese so geographically large and diverse, one challenge that we face is how best to develop synodal mechanisms that allow us to listen to the voices and understand the needs and concerns of the whole range of our people and communities.

I have also heard from some about their desire for:

- A comprehensive diocesan pastoral plan.
- The development of strategies to address specific pastoral challenges including: youth engagement; adult faith education; pastoral, sacramental and liturgical care for our most remote and struggling communities; climate change and social justice; ecumenism and interfaith relations; relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; the provision of sufficient clergy to meet our needs; the formation of parish pastoral councils and the financial viability of our parishes.
- Greater ecclesial communion and unity within the diocese.

Considering these observations and after consultation with the College of Consultors in the Diocese acting as the Council of Priests (see Can 461/1), I have decided to convoke a Diocesan Synod with the two aims:

1. Establish ongoing synodal processes of consultation.
2. Develop a plan for the establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council.

# Decree of Convocation for a Diocesan Synod in Cairns (Can 460)

## I. Introduction

In the spirit of communion and collaboration, I hereby convoke a Diocesan Synod for the Diocese of Cairns, which will serve as a vital opportunity for the faithful to engage in meaningful dialogue and discernment. This Synod is an invitation to all members of our diocese - clergy, religious, and laity - to come together in prayer and reflection, fostering a deeper understanding of our mission as the People of God. It is through this collective effort that we can respond to the call of Christ and the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our time.

## II. Objectives of the Synod

The Diocesan Synod will focus on two primary objectives:

1. **Establishing Ongoing Synodal Processes of Consultation:** This objective aims to create a framework for continuous dialogue within the diocese, ensuring that the voices of all members are heard and valued. By fostering a culture of consultation, we can better discern the needs and aspirations of our community, aligning our pastoral efforts with our mission.
2. **Developing a Plan for the Establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council:** The second objective seeks to lay the groundwork for a Diocesan Pastoral Council, which will serve as a consultative body to assist the bishop in pastoral planning and decision-making. This council will be instrumental in promoting collaboration among various ministries and enhancing the overall effectiveness of our diocesan mission.

## III. Preparatory Phase

A period of formation will take place from today, the first Sunday of Lent until the opening of the Synod on Pentecost Sunday. During the Preparatory phase there are a number of tasks:

1. **Prepare the Community:** Take initiatives to:
  - a. Educate clergy and laity about the synodal process, emphasising the importance of participation and the role of the Holy Spirit in discernment.
  - b. Develop skills in facilitating Synodal Prayer and Conversations of the Spirit to promote listening, sharing and discernment within the community ensuring that all voices are valued and heard.
2. **Formation of a Preparatory Commission:** This commission comprised of clergy and laity appointed by the bishop will assist in organising the synod, determining the questions for deliberation, and preparing the synodal directory which will guide the synodal process and ensures that all participants are aligned with the synod's goals. The Preparatory Commission will also determine the method for selection, and the number of Synod Members.

## IV. Timeline and Structure

The Synod is scheduled to commence on **Pentecost Sunday, June 8, 2025**, and will conclude on **Pentecost Sunday, May 24, 2026**. Throughout this period, various sessions will be held to facilitate discussions, gather insights, and develop actionable plans. The structure of the Synod will include:

- **June 8, 2025, Opening Session:** A liturgical celebration to invoke the Holy Spirit's guidance.
- **June 14, 2025, Open Plenary Session:** An opportunity for all Catholics in the diocese to assemble, pray and give voice to issues of concern in the diocese.
- **Consultative Sessions:** Regular meetings of the Synod Members to discuss key themes and gather feedback from participants.
- **May 16, 2026, Final Plenary Assembly:** A concluding session to present findings and recommendations to all Catholics of the diocese.
- **May 24, 2026, Closing Session:** A liturgical celebration to celebrate the closing of the Synod.
- **June to December 2026, Implementation Phase.**

## V. Participation and Consultation

I encourage the active participation of all clergy, religious, and laity in this Synod. Each member of our diocese has a unique perspective and contribution to make, and it is essential that we create an inclusive environment where everyone feels empowered to share their insights. The success of this Synod will depend on our collective commitment to listening, learning, and collaborating for the common good of our Church.

## VI. Call to Prayer

As we embark on this important journey, I invite all members of the Diocese of Cairns to join in prayer for the success of the Synod. Let us implore the Holy Spirit to guide our discussions, inspire our hearts, and strengthen our resolve to fulfill our mission as disciples of Christ. May our prayers unite us in purpose and deepen our commitment to the Gospel.

## VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, this Diocesan Synod represents a significant moment in the life of our Church, offering us the opportunity to engage in fruitful discussions that will shape our future. I look forward to the insights and recommendations that will emerge from our time together, trusting that they will lead to a renewed commitment to our mission and a deeper experience of communion within our diocese.

## VIII. Signature and Date

Given this day, March 9, in the year of our Lord, 2025

