



# **Voices & Vision: Plenary Consultation Synthesis**



CATHOLIC DIOCESE  
OF CAIRNS



**SYNOD25-26**  
CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF CAIRNS



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**Report prepared by:** Synod Preparatory Commission  
Catholic Diocese of Cairns  
183 Abbott St  
Cairns, QLD 4870

**w:** [cairns.catholic.org.au](http://cairns.catholic.org.au)

**e:** [synod@cairns.catholic.org.au](mailto:synod@cairns.catholic.org.au)

**Authors:** Cathy Spencer, Anne Chellingworth, Merinda Brock, Vicki Bell, Meg Pearce

**Contributors:** Susan Pascoe AM

**Acknowledgements:** All those who participated in the Plenary Consultation Event 2025

Members of the Synod Preparatory Commission:

Bishop Joe Caddy AM

Cathy Spencer

Anne Chellingworth

Merinda Brock

Marissa Clark

Andrea Fogarty

Fr Kerry Crowley

Meg Pearce

Chris Warner

Vicki Bell

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## Introduction

The journey of synodality in the Catholic Diocese of Cairns invites us to walk together in faith, dialogue, and shared discernment. Rooted in the ancient tradition of the Church, synodality is not a new concept, but a deepening of the way we listen to the Holy Spirit and to one another as the People of God. It calls us to cultivate a culture of encounter—where each voice matters, and every experience enriches the whole.

In this document, we offer a synthesis of responses from the Plenary Consultation Event held in 2025. It hopes to capture the insights, aspirations and challenges expressed by people across our diverse Diocese—from Cardwell in the south, to the Torres Strait in the north. Through prayerful conversations, honest sharing, and deep listening, a picture emerges of a local Church that is yearning for connection, renewal, and a shared path forward. Recurring themes that were identified were on The Life of Faith; Community & Engagement; Youth; Formation; Parish Life; and Pastoral Councils.

As we reflect on this synthesis, we acknowledge the generosity of those who participated and the Spirit-led wisdom that has shaped these findings. Guiding us toward a more synodal Church that journeys together with humility, courage, and joy.



## 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





## Plenary Consultation Event Wrap up

More than 230 people from across the Catholic Diocese of Cairns gathered on Saturday 14th of June at Brothers Leagues Club for the 2025 Diocesan Plenary Consultation event, a milestone event aimed at providing important consultation from all areas of the diocese to shape the future direction of the local Church.

Attendees travelled from every corner of the vast diocese, as far south as Tully to the remote communities of the Torres Strait and Weipa; to reflect, listen and speak boldly as part of this unique opportunity for prayerful dialogue and spiritual renewal. Parishioners, educators, clergy and lay people were invited to contribute to the process, which aimed to respond to the needs and hopes of local communities while remaining grounded in the Gospel.

Bishop Joe Caddy, who facilitated the day's reflections, said: "As we embarked on our 2025-2026 Synod journey, it was brilliant to see people from all different corners of the diocese sitting side by side, respectfully reflecting and listening to each other's views on how the Church can grow. It is clear that attendees feel honoured to be part of this process, and I am truly grateful to see them taking it seriously and embracing the community spirit."

A standout moment of the day was the open question-and-answer session with the Bishop, where parishioners were invited to ask direct anonymous questions about the diocese's direction, decisions, and challenges. Bishop Joe responded openly and honestly, acknowledging the complexity of many of the issues raised. Topics included the role of women in the

Church, how to better engage young people in the Mass, increasing faith participation in schools, and the desire for greater ethnic diversity among priests serving in the diocese. His candid and pastoral approach was well received by those present, who appreciated the rare opportunity to engage in such honest and respectful dialogue.

Special guest presenter Susan Pascoe AM, who was a member of the Vatican's Methodology Commission for the Synod on Synodality and a facilitator at the Synod Assemblies in Rome in 2023 and 2024, praised the event's energy and depth of discussion.

"There was a real sense of vibrancy in the room. When you wandered around listening to the tables, people were willing to raise big issues but also provided fresh ideas with a level of animation. What stood out to me most was how deeply people care about the Church and how seriously they're taking this moment, it says a lot that registrations had to be closed for this event. The Diocese of Cairns has shown that it's ready to have the tough conversations, together and in good faith."



## Plenary Consultation Event Wrap Up cont.

The purpose of the Diocesan Synod is to consider the current landscape of the Church in the Diocese of Cairns and to co-create a shared vision for the future.

Guided group discussions throughout the day explored themes such as community engagement, faith formation, youth involvement, leadership, and inclusivity.

The event is a key step in the diocesan journey of renewal and collaboration, with outcomes to inform future pastoral planning and local mission initiatives. As the diocese continues to face cultural,

generational and geographic challenges, the Synod represents a renewed commitment to working together in faith.

The next steps in this process will involve taking the feedback from the Plenary Consultation Day to a year of ongoing conversations and discernment by the Diocesan Synod Membership. The diocese will come together again in 12 months' time to reflect on the progress made, share what has emerged, and continue shaping a shared path forward in faith to focus on initiatives and strategies for mission in our local Church.



## Statistics

### Plenary Consultation Event

Youngest: 16      Oldest: 93      132: Women      101: Men

32: Tables      20: Parishes Represented

914km: Distance between the most southern to northern participants' home towns

### The Synod Members

58: Total      32: Men      26: Women      19: Parishes

By age brackets      4: 18-30      18: 31-50      27: 51-70      9: 70+

# Spiritual Conversation Guiding Statements

Two Spiritual Conversations occurred during the Plenary Consultation event. For the first conversation participants were asked to read and reflect on the following:

## Listening to the Faithful: A Synthesis of Previous Responses from the Diocese of Cairns

The People of God across the diocese have participated in a range of listening and consultation processes in recent years, including Diocesan Synods, the Australian Plenary Council, and the Synod on Synodality. What follows is a synthesis of the key themes that have emerged from these shared discernments.

The faithful have spoken with clarity and conviction about what matters most to them in their experience of Church. Central to their concerns is the need for deeper formation of the baptised - equipping lay people and clergy alike with the tools to articulate their faith, exercise leadership, and engage meaningfully in the Church's mission. There has been a strong desire for ongoing opportunities for spiritual, theological, and pastoral development, with particular attention to leadership and interpersonal skills for parish leaders.

A deep longing for community also emerged.

Respondents yearn for parishes that are welcoming, inclusive, and grounded in authentic relationships of love, trust, and mutual respect.

Stronger parish communities were seen as essential to evangelisation, alongside a call for more transparent and accountable leadership.

Participants called for governance models that are more collaborative and inclusive, with greater involvement of the laity, especially women, in decision making at all levels.

There is also a strong call to engage youth with energy and creativity. Making liturgy more appealing to young people, creating opportunities to hear their voices, and reaching out in new and relevant ways, were all identified as priorities for a more vibrant and connected Church.

Social justice and care for the environment emerged as key concerns, reflecting a deepening awareness of the Gospel's call to love both neighbour and creation. Parishioners expressed a desire for the Church to be a prophetic voice in areas such as human rights, economic inequality, and family support.

The sacraments remain central to Catholic life, but there is a call for renewal—greater emphasis on prayer and sacramental life, as well as ongoing dialogue around broader participation in sacramental leadership.

Underlying all these priorities is a shared hope for a local Church that listens more deeply, governs more openly, reaches more widely, and loves more boldly, embodying the mission of Jesus in every corner of the diocese.



## Spiritual Conversation Guiding Statements cont.

This text was also accompanied by the following two supporting quotes:

“Parish communities increasingly need to become places from which the baptized set out as missionary disciples and to which they return, full of joy, in order to share the wonders worked by the Lord through their witness.” — Pope Francis, Letter to Parish Priests, 2 May 2024

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3:16-17, NIV

The second Spiritual Conversation asked the question “How can we grow as a Church where everyone’s gifts are valued, leaders are well formed and accountable, and plans for the future are made together and acted upon?”. This promoted a feeling of togetherness when accompanied by the following passage:

“Just as each of us has various parts in one body, and the parts do not all have the same function: in the same way, all of us, though there are so many of us, make up one body in Christ, and as different parts we are all joined to one another. Then since the gifts that we have differ according to the grace that was given to each of us: if it is a gift of prophecy, we should prophesy as much as our faith tells us; if it is a gift of practical service, let us devote ourselves to serving; if it is teaching, to teach; if it is encouraging, to encourage. When you give, you should give generously from the heart; if you are put in charge, you must be conscientious; if you do works of mercy, let it be because you enjoy doing them.” Romans 12:4-8



## Methodology

A process of listening and discernment formed the heart of the Spiritual Conversations. This method ensured that every voice was not only heard but also taken into consideration. Each participant was given two minutes to speak freely, sharing their personal experiences, insights, and hopes for the Church. This was followed by two minutes of silent reflection, allowing individuals to prayerfully consider what they had heard, providing an intentional pause that fostered deeper understanding and empathy.

The conversation then moved into a phase of open dialogue, where participants engaged in respectful and prayerful discussion. This stage was not about debate or persuasion but about discerning together what the Spirit might be saying through the collective wisdom of the group. Ideas and themes that emerged from these conversations were carefully recorded and will be brought forward to Synod Members for further reflection and action. This process reflects the Church's commitment to synodality, not as a one-time event, but as an ongoing way of being Church, where listening, dialogue, and communal discernment guide our journey forward.

Each table was led by a trained Table Facilitator, selected through an application process and trained in the synodal method, of guiding, listening, and discernment, and effective table management. Their role was to facilitate, not participate, in discussions. To ensure their voices were still heard, facilitators were invited to submit their individual reflections after the event.

In addition to the Facilitator, each table had a separate Scribe. During Open Conversations, the Scribe recorded points of consensus and disagreement, based on a two-thirds majority vote. These points were documented anonymously using a standard template provided for the event, with the aim of capturing the participants' voices as authentically as possible. A copy of this template is included in the appendix.

To ensure a diverse range of voices in the Listening and Discernment process, attendees were assigned to tables designed to mix participants from different parishes, genders, age groups, and backgrounds. Clergy and family members were intentionally seated separately. Although this arrangement felt unfamiliar at first, by the end of the day, a strong sense of connection, camaraderie, and shared purpose had emerged.





## Disclaimer on Synthesis of Catholic Community Responses

The Synod Preparatory Commission was charged with creating this synthesis and acknowledges that the authors are participants of that Commission. This document reflects a structured analysis of responses gathered from participants present at the Plenary Consultation Event 2025, conducted as part of the Catholic Diocese of Cairns Synod 2025-26. Responses have been weighted to account for factors such as frequency, thematic relevance, and representational diversity.

While every effort has been made to approach this work with integrity and impartiality - including the use of transparent methodology, peer review, and reflective practices to minimise personal bias - the interpretation of qualitative data inherently involves subjective judgment. Please note that this document is a thematic synthesis rather than a transcript; individual contributions have been summarised, and no one should expect to see their words recorded verbatim.

The views expressed here are those of the participants and do not necessarily represent the positions of the Synod Preparatory Commission. This synthesis should be understood as a faithful attempt to capture the collective voice of the community, while recognising the limitations and nuances of such an endeavour.



## Responses to the Spiritual Conversation

In the spirit of synodality, the voices of our diocesan community present at the Plenary Consultation on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2025 have spoken with passion, honesty, and hope. The reflections gathered reveal a Church deeply committed to becoming more welcoming, inclusive, and vibrant—yet also aware of the challenges and tensions that must be addressed to truly embody the mission of Christ.

As we reviewed the responses from the Spiritual Conversations, a consistent sense of hope and anticipation for a new chapter emerged. Rather than dwelling on past shortcomings, participants expressed a strong sense of potential. There also appears to be a shared belief that the Catholic Diocese of Cairns, in its current form, does not yet fully reflect a future of growth and inclusivity. There is a deep yearning for renewal, a desire to strengthen our relationship with God, and to serve both the Church and the wider community in the name of Jesus.

Nearly every group expressed a strong desire for the Church to become more welcoming, to meet people where they are in life - whether in times of joy or struggle. There was a shared hope that the Church, both at the parish and diocesan levels, could once again become a supportive, communal hub that reflects God's compassion and the understanding nature of Jesus.



## Responses to the Spiritual Conversation cont.

Participants also highlighted the urgent need to engage young people, especially those who pass through Catholic education but do not continue their involvement in Church life. There was a call for greater support for parish priests, especially those from different cultures, and a recognition of the need to better utilise volunteers. Many expressed a deep yearning for those willing to serve to be empowered and encouraged to share their gifts in meaningful ways.

An initial analysis of the completed Scribe Templates revealed six key themes that warrant attention by Synod Members: *The Life of Faith, Community and Engagement, Youth and Education, Formation, Parish Life, and Pastoral Councils*. These themes reflect both the strengths and the areas of opportunity within our diocesan life. Additionally, several issues emerged from the points of discussion where consensus was not reached. These include the ongoing tension between traditional expressions of Church and calls to move with the times; the evolving conversation around the role of women in Church leadership, particularly in relation to ordination; and the need for greater transparency and accountability in Church governance. These insights provide a valuable foundation for strategic discernment and pastoral planning at all levels of diocesan leadership. We have attempted to synthesise these responses in order to present them to Synod Members for further discussion and the formation of practical steps for implementation.



### An important note

Below you will find many of the views and voices expressed at the Plenary Consultation on 14 June, 2025. Throughout these themes it is evident that there are structural issues within the diocese that will need to be addressed to support the success of the 25-26 Synod. Voices of frustration were heard that previous Synodal processes have not worked as intended or have been met by inconsistency and impediments. Qualitative analysis has been conducted and latent interpretations indicate recurring issues in the following areas:

- Consistency
- Transparency across governance and parish leadership
- Opportunities for lay leadership
- Skills to build parish vitality
- Accountability across all levels of parish and diocesan life
- Subsidiarity
- Consultation across all levels

## Theme One: The Life of Faith

Many participants expressed a sense of hope and positivity for the future, based on their deep faith and recognition of God in their lives. The sense of *being heard, inspired, energised and emboldened in our faith* was a common theme. Some participants expressed a desire to deepen their faith, to be more loving, and to grow in their understanding of how Jesus loves through a richer understanding of Scripture, the sacraments, and personal encounter with God.

The actions of the Holy Spirit in guiding our efforts towards deeper communion with our mission in the world were recognised. In listening together to the Word of God in Scripture, and to one another, the joy of the Gospel is lived out in *what we do, how we welcome others, how we support the vulnerable and how we build a community where all belong*.

Some participants expressed a desire to promote living the faith beyond Sundays, with a focus on knowing and understanding Scripture better, so as to *live, speak and act as followers of God*. The gift of faith through the Holy Spirit was seen as fundamental in helping us to listen to one another, recognise the truth in what is shared and remain steady in our purpose. By focusing on faith over outward image, we grow stronger in our mission and more united in our identity as a Church that reflects love.

The importance and centrality of the sacraments emerged as a key underlying theme. Through liturgical worship and the sacramental life of the Church, we become part of God's family, enjoying the loving presence of God so that we can love others. In communion with God, we become united with all peoples, strengthening each other personally and as a community. As baptised members of the Church, the faithful share an equal responsibility to be active participants in the life and mission of the church.

To fully share in the life and mission of the Church, some participants identified the need for:

- Formation to enable full participation in the life of the Church, including formation on the Eucharist, the Sacraments, Liturgy, faith, Church history, theology, and Catholic Social Teaching
- Enhancing opportunities to support and love people through the sacraments so that they remain connected to the Church
- Leadership and structures that reflect a synodal way of working, including formation for leaders in synodal practices
- Improving the experience of homilies as a source of inspiration and guidance

## Theme Two: Community & Engagement

This was the topic that most strongly resonated with those present at the Plenary Consultation on June 14, 2025. Many participants expressed a yearning to increase the sense of community among the faithful, a community where all are welcomed, accepted for who they are, and supported. Reading between the lines, it could be interpreted that attendees are not satisfied with their local Church in its current state. How can we have a Church that welcomes all, when not everyone is welcoming?

## Theme Two: Community & Engagement cont.

Responses revealed a strong desire for a better community and for opportunities for people to be embraced by the Church and experience a shared faith in God. Nearly 250 suggestions were made about building and improving a sense of community – a community that is consistent, safe, and provides a sense of belonging, not just reserved for Mass on Sundays.

*How do we distil the goodness from our religion and pass it on to everyone in our communities to improve humanity?*

There were requests to engage people throughout their lives, from the womb to the tomb, in an energetic and passionate manner and for the Church to open its arms more fully to all. This was not a suggestion directed only at those in leadership, but to all parishioners. Sharing our love of God boldly can openly serve as a beacon to those who need it. Contributors emphasised that building a vibrant parish requires heart-driven action, cultural sensitivity, and an openness to social justice issues.

While the Bishop has expressed a strong desire for the Synod to prioritise outreach to marginalised groups, particularly the poor, this focus was not clearly reflected in the feedback from participants. The absence of these voices suggests a gap between the pastoral intentions of Church leadership and the concerns surfaced during the consultation process. It raises important questions about how the Synod can more effectively engage with and respond to those on the margins of society.

### Key Themes:

- **Hospitality and Inclusion:**

Participants repeatedly stressed the importance of greeting people from all walks of life with warmth and genuine hospitality. Welcoming those of different ethnic backgrounds and lived experiences was seen as fundamental to growing as a community of faith, reminding us to walk with one another. The simple act of staying after Mass for a cup of tea or barbecue could open up a more neighbourly way of communicating and provide a conversational way to spread our faith.

*A welcoming and compassionate church community, especially for those who felt hurt, outcast or neglected in the past.*

- **Societal Awareness:**

Divisive issues need to be addressed from the pulpit, with many respondents asking for guidance on issues such as divorce, gender, LGBTQIA+ experiences, migrants and Catholics who are distant from the Church. There was a need for the Church to offer a deeper understanding of modern life and to help the faithful connect meaningfully with people throughout society.

*It is God present in all things. Not just measured by going to Mass on Sundays.*

## Theme Two: Community & Engagement cont.

- **Societal Awareness cont:**

There was also a call for more outreach opportunities, whether it be through hosting programs for those in need, providing a welcome to migrants and marginalised groups, or finding ways to include those who feel disenfranchised. The question was asked: 'Does it matter if they wear shoes or not?' A poignant reminder that our focus, as reflections of Christ, should be on welcoming and valuing the person, not on societal expectations or appearances. It challenges us to look beyond surface judgments and embrace the inclusive love that Jesus modelled. Loving, in the context of loving, like Jesus.

*The need for social justice is significant with themes of homelessness, mental health, domestic violence, etc there are numerous opportunities to model Jesus and show compassion, understanding and empathy for others.*

- **Traditional vs. Modern Values:**

A notable tension exists between traditional Church values and contemporary expectations. Opposing views were expressed about how to approach modern life while retaining traditional teachings. This includes how the Church educates around inclusivity and interacts with evolving societal norms, as well as whether Mass should use Latin and traditional liturgy or modern English to better connect with contemporary congregations.

*How do we move forward when the language spoken by the church is different to that of society and ensure we bring everyone (youth, seniors) on the journey?*

- **Cultural Sensitivity and Education:**

Contributors voiced concern about how to better educate parishioners to be more inclusive, especially in areas where traditional views may conflict with a modern understanding of identity and community. *The needs of communities to be articulated and culturally understood.*

- **The Mountain Goes to Mohammed:**

Suggestions were raised about offering a mobile church - bringing Mass and Communion directly to communities so that people would not need to travel to participate. This suggestion was made in consideration of the size of the diocese and the needs of those who are elderly or infirm and may find travel difficult.

- **Shout It Out:**

Multiple calls were made for our faith to be celebrated more openly through community events, picnics, and gatherings: *public displays and pride in our faith.* There was repeated desire to connect with those of other faith traditions, recognising that if we *purposefully work with other religious groups* [this brings about] *inclusivity on another level.*

Comments were made that there is no 'advertising' of what we do and what we can offer: *You can't sell a secret* and that we need to share the messages of Jesus more effectively and in a more consistent way.



## Theme Two: Community & Engagement cont.

- **Strong Churches, Strong Parishes, in a Strong Diocese:**

People expressed that the sense of community should begin with Churches that welcome individuals and grow into a diocese that is welcoming to all. This provides opportunities for *sharing our joy with others*. Participants expressed a desire for a Church where every voice is listened to and where calls for change and stronger engagement are acted upon. There is also a call for greater transparency, communication, and community involvement at every level of the diocese.

*This is a start for inclusiveness and growing together with a feeling of excitement.*

## Theme Three: Youth and Education

A strong theme throughout the reflections is the need to re-engage young people and families. There is concern that Catholic education, while foundational, has a waning influence on faith and is not always translating into active parish life. The term ‘full schools, empty churches’ paints a clear image. Many spoke with concern and with a sense of urgency, calling for more creative, age-appropriate, and relational approaches to faith formation—bridging the gap between school and parish, and empowering youth to be leaders and advocates of their faith. Parents, too, were identified as key to passing on the faith to their children. The Church is invited to support them more intentionally, recognising the pressures of modern life and the competing demands that often draw families away from regular worship.

### Themes and Concerns:

- **Disconnect Between Faith and Education:**

There is anxiety that Catholic schools are no longer strongly aligned with faith formation. The responsibility for teaching and modelling Catholic values is often shifted back and forth between schools and families. Points were raised about how much influence the Bishop and the diocese have over Catholic Education. Are students being taught Catholic values? Are staff in schools attending formation? Are students who receive the Sacraments encouraged to become part of their faith community or is it just a token gesture? One respondent highlighted that faith can also be found in public schools, not only in Catholic Education.

- **Engaging Youth:**

One consistent concern is the limited involvement of youth in Church leadership and liturgical life. Participants recognised that youth are the future of the Church and that there could be a detrimental long-term impact if we do not engage them more fully. Suggestions were made about supporting youth and listening to their voices, giving them leadership opportunities in liturgical and community planning, and connecting with them in ways that are meaningful and relevant. This includes offering youth-led ministries and events that reflect their lived reality and and engaging them through social media and other platforms that resonate with their experience.

*Ask: Listen to the feedback of the youth*



## Theme Three: Youth and Education cont.

- **Forming an Enduring Connection with Families:**

It was recognised that engaging families also engages youth. As with Building Community, creating safe spaces where families feel supported and included will help pass this sense of identity on to the next generation. Participants also recognised the pace and demands of modern life and the importance of meeting families where they are.

*How do we get young families wanting to build their relationship with God?*

- **Cultural Influence and Identity:**

Participants comments highlighted tensions around gender identity, government influence on education, and the Church's stance on these topics. Many expressed feeling caught between upholding Church doctrine and fostering an inclusive, safe space for all young people.

*Find ways for youth to understand the faith tradition to challenge them to find their path in the Church*

## Theme Four: Formation

There is widespread recognition that deeper formation is essential—not only for clergy but for all the baptised. The call for adult faith education, leadership training, and scriptural understanding reflects a hunger for spiritual depth and confidence in articulating the faith. Comments recorded show a group of adults who wish to do more, learn more and lead more. They are passionate about their faith and yearn for opportunities to deepen their understanding and share it confidently. Many expressed a desire for lay leadership to be empowered, supported, and respected, with clear roles and responsibilities. This includes a renewed focus on co-responsibility and discernment. The synodal journey is seen not as a one-time event but as a way of being Church—where every voice is heard, and every gift is valued.

### Themes and Concerns:

- **We Want More:**

Many called for more formation opportunities for all parishioners and clergy, to support ongoing learning and understanding. Participants asked that formation be offered in consideration of modern life, allowing opportunities to attend online or in-person, or on demand. There is also a quiet frustration that formation is often overlooked or assumed to be "completed" once adulthood is reached. The number of responses reflects an incredible yearning to learn more about our faith.

- **Call to Evangelise:**

Adults expressed a need for the Church to take a more proactive role in evangelisation—not just preaching but living the Gospel through example. [By] *recognising and supporting individuals, we strengthen the Church and ensure faith is shared with passion, clarity and purpose.* Respondents want to evangelise and to be equipped with the skills to articulate their faith and engage others.

## Theme Four: Adult Formation cont.

- **Service Through Action:**

Many comments reflect the idea that true formation comes from volunteering, listening, and being present in the community. Faith is seen as something to act on, not just believe in.

*Putting Catholic teaching into action, service, humility and love.*

- **Let Us Lead:**

There were repeated requests for having lay-led Masses and additional roles for lay leadership, allowing people to share their understanding and knowledge of faith through service and to feel the value of contributing to their Church.

- **Sacramental Value:**

A reverence for the sacraments persists. Participants expressed a desire for more meaningful engagement with sacramental life, not as mere rituals, but as encounters with grace. Some participants expressed a desire to draw more fully on the rich traditions of the Church liturgy.

- **Passion and Purpose:**

There was a strong sense that participants crave more vitality in their faith communities—something beyond obligation and tradition. They want to deepen their faith, in all aspects of life, through more formation, opportunities to lead and serve, and recognition for their dedication to the faith, through meaningful celebration.

## Theme Five: Parish Life

The role of pastoral councils emerged as a key theme in the synodal discussions. Many see these councils as underutilised or lacking a clear purpose. Yet, there is great hope that they can become engines of creativity, discernment, and shared leadership. Participants expressed a desire to revitalise these councils so they can better serve the needs of the parish community.

### Themes and Concerns:

- **Renewing Our Celebration of the Mass:**

Many expressed a desire for more dynamic, participatory liturgies that still honour traditional elements. There is a craving for richer, more meaningful experiences and *a need to teach with clarity and truth of the Church and matters which are relevant to the times we are in.* Participants called for reaching people through more platforms, and highlighted the importance of homilies that are engaging, genuine, authentic, and alive. Some noted the challenge of understanding homilies delivered in strong accents, and asked for support to help everyone feel connected. Additionally, some asked that respect be shown by honouring the *significance and centrality of prayer and the sacred atmosphere of the church by respecting silent prayer before and after Mass.*

## Theme Five: Parish Life cont.

- **Inclusivity in Leadership:**

Lay-leadership was frequently mentioned, along with requests that the gifts of the laity be recognised. Many participants expressed the view that leadership should not be limited to clergy, but should include all those who are willing and able to serve. The comments recorded, together with those in the previous chapter, show a strong drive for broader lay participation in leadership within their community.

- **Supporting the Clergy:**

Many tables expressed a strong desire to increase the number of priests in our diocese and emphasised the need to broaden the cultural diversity of our clergy.

There was a shared view that priests and deacons could be better supported by lay people assisting with administrative tasks, allowing them to devote more time to their pastoral and ministry roles. At the same time, some participants felt that priests should be more active within the community, noting that their responsibilities extend beyond celebrating Mass and delivering homilies. Additionally, three tables highlighted a desire to hear more from priests on difficult and challenging issues.

Appeals were also made for parishioners to offer support to those who speak with strong accents, and for compulsory induction processes to be implemented for clergy moving between parishes or arriving from overseas.

- **Increased Opportunities:**

Requests are made for more opportunities to build connection, offer support, and create groups that serve a variety of people - from mothers' groups, adoration, and scripture studies, to women's fellowship and even fishing groups - allowing more community formation within and between parishes. There is an understanding that parishes are often at capacity and that additional resources and volunteers may be needed to help make these initiatives successful. *Investigate roles both existing and new to contribute to the church.*

## Theme Six: Pastoral Councils (Diocesan & Parish)

This final chapter centres on leadership, transparency, and the effectiveness of Church governance through pastoral councils and lay involvement. It focuses on the position and inclusivity of Pastoral Councils and Parishes, under the broader leadership of the diocese.

### Themes and Concerns:

- **Leadership and Responsibility:**

Comments reflected a desire for the Church and its leadership to help the faithful discern their vocations and contribute meaningfully to parish life. There was acknowledgement that: Leadership should not be left to the same people, as they get burnt out - turn the pyramid upside down, get more people involved in governance. It can be interpreted from the many perspectives shared that offers of support are sometimes not appreciated or accepted by those already in leadership roles.

## Theme Six: Pastoral Councils (Diocese & Parishes) cont.

*Fostering relationships in our parishes where people feel valued and a sense of belonging, so that they feel able to contribute.*

- **Let Us Help:**

Suggestions were made to survey parishioners to help identify the gifts they could offer such as *counters of money, gardeners, Eucharistic Ministers, hospitality, etc.*, and to share these roles in a spirit of co-responsibility. Everyone needs to show up. *The Spirit is saying we are all responsible for our Church.*

This idea was also accompanied by calls to simplify the process of applying for blue cards and organising police checks.

As one participant beautifully expressed, *we need fire in our belly—not just to sit back and criticise, but to get involved.*

- **Transparency and Trust:**

Transparency in decision-making and handling of internal matters (e.g. investigations) is seen as essential. Participants expressed that trust can only be built through openness and a synodal approach at all levels. Suggestions were made to hold regular meetings and reviews to allow for continual improvement. There is some disparity between the view of what constitutes too-much and too-little transparency and this is an area the Synod Members will need to consider carefully.

- **Communication and Visibility:**

There is a need for better communication about parish and diocesan activities, decisions, and how these impact parish life. There is also a call for the *development of listening/dialogue skills at both diocesan and parish level*. Given the breadth of the diocese, participants suggested the development of an updated website and increased use of social media to promote a united, transparent and communicative front.

- **A Coordinated Approach:**

A consultative approach is requested to help make the journey forward successful. *How do we effect meaningful change beyond this discussion?* Consideration is needed for leadership and structures to reflect a synodal way of working, including formation for leaders. This should be supported by *concrete planning, implementation and accountability*. There is a perception of disconnect between individual churches, parishes, and Diocesan Services. Requests were made for strong, clear governance. It was acknowledged that not all parishes have the same resources in the terms of employees, volunteers or parishioners, and that some requests may need to be adapted accordingly. Participants also asked that there is clarity in the formation of a Diocesan Pastoral Plan. They expressed that this plan should be *a force of creativity in spirit*, and ensure a *clear communicative voice and agency in synodal practice*.

## Theme Six: Pastoral Councils (Diocese & Parishes) cont.

- **A Coordinated Approach cont:**

*The Church moving forward is the responsibility of all of us*

The need for consistency is commonly raised, though without clarity about what it refers to. It may be possible to draw inferences from this, such as a need for more consistency in the experience of parishioners from parish to parish, in sacramental programs, consistency of appropriate messaging in homilies, and consistency in communication overall. This remains open to question. If the diocese led the way with a structured program and guidelines through a Diocesan Pastoral Plan, would this be enough to answer these questions, or is more clarification needed?

Let us continue to build a Church where leadership is shared, gifts are honoured, and every parish becomes a vibrant community of faith, hope, and love.

*We are in a new era – an ever-changing context that requires continuous critique and reinterpretation to continue to be meaningful and relevant for our people.*

## Areas Where Consensus Was Not Met

- **Women in Leadership:**

The role of women in the Church, as deacons or priests was a frequently recurring issue throughout the consultation. The Commission recognises the significance of these concerns but also acknowledge that this is not a matter that can be changed at a diocesan level. Participants are referred to Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* (104) for further reflection on this topic: *"The reservation of the priesthood to males, as a sign of Christ the Spouse who gives himself in the Eucharist, is not a question open to discussion"... "Its key and axis is not power understood as domination, but the power to administer the sacrament of the Eucharist; this is the origin of its authority, which is always a service to God's people. This presents a great challenge for pastors and theologians, who are in a position to recognise more fully what this entails with regard to the possible role of women in decision-making in different areas of the Church's life."*

Opportunities exist for positions of lay-leadership, administration, support and coordination on a number of levels. How can this be recognised more thoroughly so that women feel that their input and skills are recognised, valued and supported?

- **Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Recognition:**

The subject of including a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country was raised with views expressed across the spectrum. Some participants felt there is too little acknowledgement, while others felt there is too much. We leave it to the Synod and the Bishop to consider how best to address this.



## Areas Where Consensus Was Not Met cont.

- **Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Recognition cont:**  
In particular, the Bishop emphasised the importance of engaging First Nations peoples in a spirit of welcome, respect, and inclusion. However, this emphasis did not emerge with the same clarity in the participant responses. This disconnect points to the need for more culturally sensitive and proactive efforts to ensure that First Nations voices are not only heard but meaningfully included in the life and mission of the Church.
- **Inclusivity & Complex Moral Issues:**  
Consensus was not reached on several controversial topics related to inclusivity, including the pastoral approach to divorced persons, those who identify as LGBTQIA+, gender identity and those who have had abortions or undertaken IVF. It was not always clear from the comments whether participants were expressing support for or opposition to these issues. However, the recording of these topics as areas that did not reach consensus suggests that while participants were passionate about them, the group as a whole, did not feel it was the place of the Synod to pass comment or make determinations on these matters.
- **Move with the Times or Stay with Tradition:**  
There is also contention about how the Church should move into the future - whether by becoming more inclusive of contemporary approaches and practices, or returning to more traditional roots, such as Latin Masses. Music was frequently brought up as an opportunity to engage younger audiences, though concerns were raised about whether this might exclude older parishioners. It is a delicate balance to be inclusive and welcoming to all.

*How do we evolve as a Church whilst staying true to Catholic tradition?*

## Common and Key Recurring Themes

- Welcome for all
- Womb to Tomb
- Disconnect between Church and societal values
- Mobilising the Church
- Communication
- Ecumenism
- Full schools/empty churches
- Formation for all, including Clergy & Deacons
- Support for Priests
- Lay Leadership
- Parish – Clarity, Community and Cohesion
- Strategic Plan and Accountability
- Consultative Structures

## Conclusion

Those who attended the Plenary Consultation left with renewed hope, believing that the Catholic Diocese of Cairns is on the cusp of a new beginning, a place where all are welcome, God is joyfully celebrated, and the love of our Lord is boldly shared among parishioners.

Across all chapters, the call is for **authenticity, inclusivity, and meaningful engagement**. There is a clear desire for the Church to hold onto its rich traditions while also having the courage to face modern challenges with compassion and clarity. As one table eloquently put it, *the challenge is enormous, and the need is great*.

The responsibility now rests with the bishop and Synod Members to honour the voices that have been heard and to transform these reflections into practical structures and strategies. In doing so they will guide our diocesan family with wisdom, courage, and faith. With trust in the Holy Spirit and one another, we move forward together united in purpose, grounded in love, and filled with hope for a Church that is vibrant, inclusive, and alive with the mission of Christ.



## Glossary

### Term:

Blue Card

Catholic Social Teaching

church

The Church

The Diocese

diocese

Ecumenism

Inclusion/Inclusivity

Liturgical Life

Spiritual Conversation

Subsidiarity

Qualitative

### Usage:

An Australian identification required for working with children; referenced in the context of parish volunteer requirements.

A body of doctrine developed by the Church on social justice issues, rooted in Scripture and Church tradition.

Local parish level

Indicates the overarching body of the Catholic Church

The governing body, used to replace the term Catholic Diocese of Cairns

Representing the region that is encompassed

Efforts by Christians of different denominations to work and pray together in pursuit of unity

A Church approach that welcomes all people regardless of background, including those often marginalised.

The worship life of the Church, including the celebration of the sacraments and liturgical seasons.

A structured process of reflective listening and dialogue aimed at discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit.

The principle that decisions should always be taken at the lowest possible level or closest to where they will have their effect

On an understanding of concepts and experiences through non-numerical data like interviews and observations





## The Synod Prayer

Heavenly Father,  
We come before You,  
seeking Your guidance and wisdom  
during our Diocesan Synod journey.

May this be a time of renewal and growth,  
where we listen to one another  
with respect and compassion,  
and where we seek to fulfil the call  
to evangelise and serve all,  
especially the poor and distressed.

Strengthen us in our mission  
to proclaim the Gospel with courage and joy.  
Help us to discern the needs of our community,  
and to respond with faith-filled generosity.

Mary, Mother of Good Counsel,  
Patroness of our diocese,  
we turn to you in this time  
of reflection and discernment.

Intercede for us, that we may be open  
to the promptings of the Holy Spirit,  
and that our discussions may be filled  
with charity, understanding, and truth.

Through Christ our Lord, we pray.  
Amen.

# SYNODAL DIRECTORY

## DIOCESAN SYNOD 2025-2026

### CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF CAIRNS

## I. Nature and Purpose of the Synod

**The Nature of the Synod** A diocesan Synod is an assembly of selected clergy, religious, and laity that assists the Bishop in governing the diocese (Canon 460). It is a key instrument of communion, consultation, and discernment, ensuring that pastoral activities align with the universal Magisterium of the Church. Governed by Canons 460-468 and the 1997 Instruction on Diocesan Synods, it enables the faithful to share responsibility in building up the Body of Christ.<sup>i</sup>

### **The Purpose of the Synod**

The Synod aims to renew and unify the diocese by:

- Assisting the Bishop's mission of teaching, sanctifying, and governing.
- Consulting the diocesan community to strengthen the Church's mission.
- Discerning the Holy Spirit's guidance in pastoral direction.
- Encouraging missionary renewal and apostolic engagement.
- Promoting the formation of clergy and fostering vocations.

The Bishop convokes, presides over, and legislates the Synod, ensuring its decisions align with both diocesan needs and Church law.

### **The Work of the Synod**

The Synod focuses on:

- Promoting doctrinal understanding and pastoral effectiveness.
- Evaluating current programmes and proposing new initiatives.
- Enhancing clergy formation and governance structures.
- Strengthening unity within the diocese and with the Holy See.



Through listening, discernment, and shared responsibility, the Synod becomes a catalyst for renewal, shaping the diocese's future while upholding its tradition and mission.

## II. Convocation of the Synod

'It is the sole prerogative of the Diocesan Bishop, in his prudent judgement and having consulted with the Council of Priests, to convoke a diocesan Synod.' (Can. 461).

Bishop Caddy convoked a diocesan synod on 9th March 2025, the First Sunday of Lent:

*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.**

*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. Develop a plan for the establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council.**

*This 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. Synod Membership

The Diocesan Bishop presides over the Diocesan Synod. The Code of Canon Law (Can. 463) sets out those persons who are “ex officio” Synod Members. They are for the Diocese of Cairns:

- The Vicar General;
- The Episcopal Vicars;
- The Canon of the Cathedral Church;
- The members of the College of Consultors
- The Deans of the Deaneries;
- The Rector of Holy Spirit Seminary

The Diocesan Bishop may also invite others to be members of the diocesan Synod, whether clerics or members of institutes of consecrated life or lay members of the faithful (Can. 463.2).

The Synod Preparatory Commission invited expressions of interest for Synod membership from March to May 2025, and promoted the opportunity widely across parishes, diocesan agencies, and the broader community. The final composition of the Synod body will be determined by Bishop Caddy, with the counsel of the Preparatory Commission, to ensure a faithful representation of the People of God across the Diocese.

The Diocesan Bishop shall communicate in writing to members, their designation as members and likewise, members, not bound ex officio and de jure, shall communicate their acceptance in writing.

Synod Members once lawfully designated, have a right and duty to participate in the sessions of Synod. If they are unable to attend a proxy cannot be sent in his or her place. One may lose one's membership by reason of loss of title - that which qualified one to become a member - or by removal by the Bishop for a lawful reason.

As provided in Can. 833, before commencing the Synodal discussions, the members of the Synod, as ecclesial officers, shall make the Profession of Faith.

The Diocesan Bishop may invite to the diocesan Synod as observers some ministers or members of Churches or ecclesial communities which are not in full communion with the Catholic Church, but who can play an important role in the renewal of the Catholic Church.

## IV. Officers and Commissions of the Synod

In keeping with ecclesial norms and pastoral best practice, the following offices and structures support the preparation and celebration of the Synod.

### **President:**

The Diocesan Bishop presides over the diocesan Synod. He may however, delegate a Vicar general or an episcopal Vicar to fulfil this office at individual sessions of the Synod. (Can. 462 ' 2.)

### **Preparatory Commission:**

The Bishop is obliged to constitute a preparatory commission.

*'The members of this preparatory commission are chosen by the Bishop from amongst the clergy and other faithful who are distinguished by their pastoral prudence and by their professional competence and who, in so far as possible, reflect the various charisms and ministries of the People of God. Some members should be expert in the disciplines of Canon Law and Sacred Liturgy.'* (Instr. III, B, 1)

In accordance with the Instruction on Diocesan Synods (1997), III.B.1, the Diocesan Bishop has established a Synod Preparatory Commission to assist in all aspects of the planning and organisation of the Synod. In the Diocese of Cairns, this Commission also fulfils the responsibilities typically assigned to other synodal offices and commissions. The Commission supports the Bishop in preparing the Synod Directory, identifying the questions for synodal deliberation, promoting consultation across the Diocese, and ensuring spiritual and liturgical preparation. The Bishop presides over meetings of the Commission or appoints a delegate in his absence.

The members of the Synod Preparatory Commission are:

- Fr Kerry Crowley (VG, PP)
- Andrea Fogarty
- Marissa Clark
- Chris Warner
- Cathy Spencer
- Anne Chellingworth
- Vicki Bell
- Meg Pearce (Communications)
- Merinda Brock (Administration)

Advisors:

- Dr Susan Pascoe AM (Church Governance and Synodality)
- Fr Peter Blayney (Canon Lawyer)

**Moderator:**

The role of Moderator, described in *Instruction* III.B.2.3 as one who oversees the preparatory stages of the Synod, coordinates synodal structures, and moderates synodal sessions, is fulfilled in the Diocese of Cairns by the Synod Preparatory Commission as a collective body. Under the authority of the Diocesan Bishop, the Commission facilitates the planning, dialogue, and discernment required for the Synod process.

**Secretariat and Communications:**

The functions of Synodal Secretariat and Communications Commission are likewise carried out by the Synod Preparatory Commission. Organisational responsibilities include the coordination of logistics, management of documentation, and oversight of finances. The Commission manages communication with parishes, diocesan agencies, and the broader community through digital and print media, press releases, the diocesan website, and social media. In keeping with *Instruction* III.B.1 and III.C.1, the Commission ensures that all the faithful are informed about the purpose, scope, and progress of the Synod.

**Consultative:**

To assist the Diocesan Bishop, whose prerogative it is to propose topics for the consideration of the Synod Members, the faithful shall be afforded the opportunity of expressing their needs, desires and opinions with regard to the topics to be dealt with in the Synod. Moreover, the clergy of the diocese shall be asked separately to formulate proposals by way of response to the pastoral challenges with which they are confronted. This latter shall be done at meetings of the clergy in Deaneries, convened for that purpose, and at diocesan gatherings of the clergy. (Instr. I, 1 & III, C, 2)

The consultation shall endeavour to reach all ‘vital forces’ of the People of God present and operating in the Diocese. A key opportunity for this will be the Plenary Consultation Event on Saturday 14 June 2025, which is open to all the people of God in the Cairns Diocese. The Ignatian process of listening and discernment will be followed as it honours the call for a more synodal, participatory Church – one where all the baptised are invited to reflect, speak, and help shape the future of our diocesan community. This event will enable broad participation and direct contribution to the Synod’s discernment.

In addition to this gathering, Synod consultation will include clergy, consecrated religious, parish and school communities, youth and young adults, ecclesial movements, First Nations peoples, and culturally diverse communities. The aim is to hear from the many voices that form the life of the Church in the Diocese of Cairns. In accordance with canonical norms and the Instruction on Diocesan Synods, proposals or positions contrary to the doctrine or discipline of the Church, or matters reserved to higher ecclesial authority, will be respectfully excluded from consideration.

### **Determining the Questions:**

At the conclusion of the consultative process, with the assistance of persons expert in the various disciplines and pastoral spheres and with the assistance of the preparatory commission, the Bishop shall proceed to determine those questions on which the synodal debate will concentrate.

Finally, the approved texts of these questions should be transmitted to the members of the Synod and sufficient time allotted for them to be studied before the initiation of the synodal sessions. (Instr. III, C, 3)

### **Legal and Liturgical Function:**

Legal and liturgical responsibilities are also undertaken by the Synod Preparatory Commission, with support from qualified consultants in Canon Law, Sacred Liturgy, and related fields. Legal oversight ensures alignment with the universal law of the Church and supports the drafting of Synodal declarations and decrees. The Commission also oversees the preparation of Synodal liturgies and promotes prayer for the success of the Synod across the Diocese. This includes:

- A designated Synod Prayer;
- Petitions for inclusion in the Universal Prayer at Sunday Mass and other diocesan liturgies.

The Opening of the Synod will be celebrated at the 10 am Mass at St Monica’s Cathedral on Pentecost Sunday, June 8, 2025, where the Bishop will formally commission Synod Members.



The Synod will close with Mass at St Monica's Cathedral on Pentecost Sunday, May 24, 2026.

### **Spiritual, Catechetical, and Formational Preparation:**

The Synod Preparatory Commission will provide for the formation of Synod Members and the faithful for the more effective and fruitful celebration of the Synod.

*'The celebration of the Synod affords the Bishop a privileged opportunity for the formation of the faithful. It leads to a well-articulated catechesis of the faithful with regard to the mystery of the Church and the participation of all the faithful in her mission. Such catechesis is carried on in the light of the teaching of the Church's Magisterium and particularly that of the Second Vatican Council. To this end, concrete directives can be given to priests for preaching.'* (Instr. III, C, 1)

## **V. Conducting the Synod**

Following the initial Plenary Consultation Event, the Synod body will convene up to five times between August 2025 and March 2026. During these sessions, Synod Members will advise the Bishop on matters of pastoral significance, engage in prayerful discernment and respectful debate on the questions for deliberation set by the Bishop, and vote on proposals for future action.

### **Voting Procedures**

While the Synod is a consultative assembly, voting may be used to gauge the level of consensus among Members on proposals or directions arising from discussion. The following norms apply:

- **Eligibility:** All duly designated Synod Members are entitled to vote.
- **Consultative Vote:** At the Bishop's discretion, a consultative vote may be taken on specific proposals. The voting method (e.g. show of hands or written ballot) will be determined by the Bishop or his delegate.
- **Majority Required:** A two-thirds majority of those present and voting is ordinarily required to indicate strong consensus.
- **Recording Results:** Vote outcomes will be documented as part of the official Synod acts and presented to the Bishop to assist in his discernment.

## VI. Synodal Declarations and Decrees

The proposals affirmed by Synod Members through consultative vote are presented to the Bishop as recommendations for future action. The Bishop is responsible for deciding which of these shall be implemented, drawing on the wisdom of the Synod, the needs of the diocese, and the universal discipline and teaching of the Church.

The Bishop alone signs any Synodal declarations and decrees, which then serve as pastoral norms for diocesan life.

These declarations and decrees will be formally presented to the people of God in the Diocese of Cairns at the Closing Plenary Session on May 16, 2026.

<sup>1</sup> This Directory is shaped by the canonical norms outlined in Canons 460–468 of the *Code of Canon Law* and the 1997 *Instruction on Diocesan Synods*, jointly issued by the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.



## Scribe Template

An important part of discernment is listening to the voice of God within each of us. As a scribe, the completed responses should reflect the diversity of views and opinions expressed, both positive and negative. It should be faithful to the people's voices and to whatever emerge from their reflection.

Before submitting your group's response, take some time to summarise accurately on the emerging actions the group has identified.

Overall, the response should capture what the Holy Spirit has inspired the group to discern.

### First Spiritual Conversation

From around the table, what topics should be raised for the Members to consider during the Synodal process (May 2025-May 2026). Use a 2/3 consensus to determine.

What were the interior movements or notable feelings in the group? What points of view were associated with these movements?

First Spiritual Conversation cont.

Please record any points of discussion that did not reach consensus:


Second Spiritual Conversation

From around the table, what topics should be raised for the Members to consider during the Synodal process (May 2025-May 2026). Use a 2/3 consensus to determine.




## Second Spiritual Conversation cont.

What were the interior movements or notable feelings in the group? What points of view were associated with these movements?

Please record any points of discussion that did not reach consensus:

Scribe: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Table Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_