
Feedback Report from the First Synod Member Meeting: 2nd August 2025

Introduction

This report summarises the feedback collected from group work at the first Synod Members' meeting on 2 August. The discussion centred on the structures, processes, and systems within the Diocese of Cairns that may either inhibit or enable growth in faith and mission. Participants considered the opportunities, challenges, and aspirations of clergy, parishioners, educators, and community members who seek to live and share their faith more fully.

The feedback points to the need for deeper formation, better communication, stronger leadership structures, meaningful engagement with families and young people, and a renewed sense of mission. While the challenges are real—ranging from lack of resources to cultural shifts in society—the conversation reflected hope that our Church can become a more welcoming, faithful, and life-giving presence.

1. Diocesan & Parish Leadership, Pastoral Councils, and Governance

- The absence of a diocesan pastoral council, combined with inconsistency in parish pastoral councils, creates a gap in consultation and lay participation.
- A coordinated approach is needed to re-establish parish and diocesan pastoral councils and support them with clear role descriptions, purpose, accountability, and ongoing formation.
- Leadership formation is critical for both Clergy and Lay. Effective leaders require mentoring as well as external and internal formation to guide communities faithfully.
- Clergy should not carry the responsibility of parish leadership alone. Defined volunteer roles and leadership opportunities for lay people will ensure broader responsibility and sustainability.
- A “top-down, bottom-up” consultation process, modelled on synodality, was recommended to ensure all voices are heard.

2. Resources, Structures, and Accountability

- Limited time, finances, and personnel were identified as major barriers.
- Clear questions need to be asked: *What should we stop doing? What should we start doing? What resources are available?*
- Resourcing pastoral ministry with adequate funding, staffing, and planning was considered essential.





- Suggestions for structure included:
 - Establishing a diocesan directorate to coordinate, implement, and monitor strategic and pastoral plans.
 - Setting 4–5 key pastoral priorities through synodal processes, reviewed regularly.
 - Developing tools and templates for accountability and sharing success stories.
- A culture of patience, encouragement, and realistic expectations was advised, recognising that change will bring both resistance and disruption.

3. Communication and Engagement

- A major communication gap exists between Diocesan Services, parishes, schools, and parishioners.
- Current tools (bulletins, announcements) often “preach to the converted” rather than reaching people whose connection to the Church is limited or distant.
- Suggestions included:
 - Strategic use of technology and social media with clear, consistent messaging.
 - Parish-level FAQs, flyers, and accessible online information.
 - Establishing a diocesan or community radio station.
 - Greater recognition of Catholic agencies (Centacare, Caritas, Vinnies, Rosies, etc.) as partners in the Church’s mission.
- Communication should be both informative and invitational, helping people see the Church as a family home open to all.

4. Adult Faith Formation and Education

- There is a strong call to return to foundational catechesis and Scripture formation, both for Catholics and those seeking faith.
- Faith formation opportunities for adults and young people are underdeveloped and need revitalisation.
- Suggested approaches include:
 - Bible studies, Lectio Divina, and catechesis for volunteers and parishioners.
 - Annual retreats, missions by visiting priests, and regular conferences.
 - Better formation for altar servers, music ministers, and catechists.
 - Clearer vocational discernment processes.
- Schools play a vital role in our Church communities but are not always well connected to parish life. Teachers (Catholic and non-Catholic) need support to integrate faith formation into education.





- Parents' roles in passing on faith to their children was highlighted as essential but often missing.
- Faith should be presented as transformative and lived, rather than rote or purely academic.
- Liturgical life is central, but renewal depends on the participation of the faithful. Feedback pointed to:
 - The importance of reverence, silence, and appropriate hymns.
 - The need for engaging, relatable homilies that connect with people's daily lives.
 - Eucharistic processions, Stations of the Cross, and devotions (First Fridays/Saturdays) as tools for renewal.
 - Greater diversity and accessibility—for example, using screens for homilies when accents are a barrier.
- Concerns about sacraments being celebrated in ways that feel transactional (e.g., in schools), rather than leading to deeper discipleship.
- Formation must extend beyond receiving sacraments, to foster lifelong practice and understanding.

5. Youth and School Connection

- Feedback revealed a disconnect between parishes and schools, with faith formation often limited to sacramental programs and school events.
- Many parents enjoy school Masses but this does not carry over into parish life.
- Social media has drowned out the search for meaning, and young people need space to engage with faith authentically, without it being watered down.
- Schools should better encourage children to become active parish members, with parents' involvement being crucial.
- More is needed to help young people transition into parish communities.

6. Community, Mission, and Evangelisation

- A recurring theme was the need to rekindle a sense of community in parishes.
- Parishes should be experienced as a safe and welcoming home where people feel they belong.
- Outreach strategies included:
 - Pop-up church events in public spaces.
 - Social gatherings with food, music, and activities to show the joyful side of faith.
 - Home visits, small groups, and one-to-one evangelisation.
- Youth and families were emphasised as vital to renewal. Models such as Hillsong show that fun, engaging, and relational approaches can draw people in.





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- Witness, authenticity, and joy were seen as essential—living faith proudly and openly, without being defined by past scandals.
- Greater collaboration with other Christian churches and faith groups was encouraged, focusing on commonalities while remaining faithful to Catholic teaching.

Conclusion

The feedback reflects both challenges and hope for the Catholic Diocese of Cairns. The key messages can be summarised as follows:

- **Leadership and formation** are critical to sustaining renewal, supported by pastoral councils and lay leaders.
- **New Resources and accountability** structures are essential to guide change.
- **Communication and engagement** need significant improvement to reach both active and those less connected to the Church.
- **Faith education and formation** must be lifelong, transformative, and connected between parish, school, and family.
- **Liturgy and sacraments** remain central, yet their celebration requires renewed reverence, participation and understanding among the faithful.
- **Youth and families** represent both the challenge and the opportunity for the future.
- **Community and mission** must be rekindled, focusing on joy, welcome, and authentic witness

Reviving the Church in Cairns will require prayer, patience, and courage. It will mean rediscovering the heart of our mission: to live and share the Gospel in a way that is faithful, joyful, and open to all. If undertaken with unity and perseverance, this renewal can lead to a stronger, more vibrant, and more hopeful Church for generations to come.



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