

Introduction

On Saturday, 20 September, Synod Members gathered at St Mary's Catholic College, Woree, for their second Synod Meeting — an opportunity to come together in prayer, discernment, and shared listening. Guided by the Holy Spirit, members reflected on the life of our Diocese and the many ways we are called to grow as a synodal Church — a Church that listens, walks together, and reaches out in faith and service.

What follows is a collation of responses to the questions discussed on the day. These responses represent the voices and hearts of our attending Synod Members and expresses both hope and challenge, faith and longing. Together, they form a picture of a community seeking to follow Christ with openness, humility, and courage.

Presentation by Bishop Joseph Caddy

Please find following a transcript of the Bishop Joe's *Presentation to the Second Session of the Synod*.

I want to make a plea for boldness and courage in our Synod. Through this process, can we reimagine what our Church could be—both in service to our communities and in worship of the Lord?

Allow me to reflect briefly on my experiences over the past twelve months since moving here to Far North Queensland.

This is a beautiful region, blessed with welcoming and hospitable people. Yet, it is also a place facing serious challenges.

Affordable housing for families and first-home buyers is one pressing issue. Another is the need for genuine healing strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, many of which continue to experience the deep economic and social consequences of past policies that removed children and alienated people from their country.

One cannot ignore the high levels of reported street crime. Assaults, home invasions, and car thefts dominate the headlines of the *Cairns Post*—alongside the inevitable crocodile stories.

During last year's state election, youth crime became a central issue. The new government campaigned on the simplistic slogan: "*adult crime, adult time*." Yet there was little analysis of the deeper causes of antisocial and criminal behaviour among young people—many of whom come from families facing insecure housing, domestic violence, and substance abuse. Too many are disengaged from education.

Domestic violence itself is another grave concern, with tragic and fatal outcomes for far too many women and children.

We also see a lack of support for some of the most vulnerable in our community— young mothers, the aged, the seriously ill, and the lonely. Increasingly, they are



presented with options such as abortion or voluntary assisted dying, often at the expense of life-affirming alternatives: love, accompaniment, and care.

In my visits to the Torres Straits, I have heard from elders who are deeply concerned about the impacts of climate change. Rising seas and stronger tides are reshaping islands, eroding coastlines, and even washing away ancestral graves.

Another pressing concern is the future of our local Church. It has been ten years since a priest was ordained for this diocese, and we currently have no seminarians. How will we sustain the pastoral needs of the future? We are fortunate to have priests generously serving here on loan from overseas, but we must ask: what will come next?

Turning now to the Synod journey here in Cairns.

Our Synod began on Pentecost Sunday this year and will continue through to Pentecost Sunday 2026.

At our first gathering, the entire Catholic community of the diocese was invited. We assisted participants from remote communities with travel and accommodation.

At that plenary session, people gathered around tables in spiritually guided conversations led by trained facilitators. Through deep listening, we sought to discern the presence of the Spirit and the concerns that the faithful believe must be addressed in our diocese.

With some 250 participants, the session was extremely fruitful and raised many issues.

Yet what surprised me was what was *not* raised. The very issues that weigh heavily on our wider community—climate change, sanctity of life, affordable housing, domestic violence, youth crime, community safety, truth-telling and justice for First Nations peoples—were scarcely mentioned. The only concern raised regarding the priest shortage focused on recruiting more clergy from overseas.

I would not expect us to reach agreement on such wide range of complex and controversial issues. But I was surprised that they barely surfaced at all. Surely the Church has something vital to offer in each of these areas.

The words of the Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et Spes* come to mind:

“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.”

However in our consultation process, I struggled to hear that echo.

And yet I know that it is there. I see it in the compassion and concern of so many across our diocese. Perhaps when we meet in Church assemblies, we naturally focus inward—on matters strictly “of the Church.”

I want to encourage us instead to think more boldly and more broadly: to see ourselves as the Church *in the world*. As *Gaudium et Spes* reminds us: “Nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in the hearts of the followers of Christ.” This openness is at the heart of what it means to be the People of God.



That is not to say that the matters that did arise in our plenary session such as, lay faith formation, the viability of parishes, the place of young people, the role of women in the church and other issues are not important. They are and they need to be addressed, some of them, urgently.

Acknowledging too that, as the Church in Cairns, we already make a remarkable contribution to the life of our community in the works of our parishes, schools, and social outreach.

But through the Synod, I hope we can discern together more strategic and integrated ways to be the worshipping, prayerful, serving community that the Lord is calling us to be.

Remember the two objectives of our Synod are to:

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

The Good News of Jesus Christ is not our possession—not even the possession of the Catholic Church. It is destined for all humanity and for all creation.

That means we must listen for voices often absent from our gatherings:

- Those who have never heard the Good News.
- Those who have heard it but been hurt by the institutional Church and now feel unwelcome.
- Those who are poor, burdened, and longing for God's healing and mercy.
- The voice of creation itself, crying out in rising seas and warming climates that threaten God's gift of beauty and life for future generations.

My prayer is that this Synod will make us a bold and courageous Church—willing to step beyond our comfort zones to proclaim Christ's Good News to the world.

I also pray that we may become a humble and listening Church—praying deeply, worshipping joyfully, and discerning faithfully the Spirit's direction in the voices of all God's people: the cries of the poor, the groaning of creation, and the hopes of our children for lives of meaning and purpose.

Reflective Report

Compilation of Feedback to Bishop Joe's Presentation

In response to the above address from Bishop Joseph Caddy, the following question was asked to Synod Members, in a facilitated spiritual conversation: How can we, at parish and diocesan levels, strategically and intentionally, go out to where these voices already dwell—listening with humility and walking alongside them, so that the Church may truly reflect the fullness of God's people?



The feedback gathered under this theme captures both the hope and heaviness felt across our communities. Groups spoke candidly about the challenge of “an *overwhelming number of issues, difficult to have a clear picture or solution,*” and the sense that “*it’s easier at parish level.*” These words remind us that the heart of renewal lies closest to the individuals lived experience.

Many comments pointed to a yearning for presence, visibility, and belonging. One group wrote of the need for a “*visible presence in communities of need,*” another naming the pain of the “*lonely or elderly falling through cracks.*” There is deep compassion in these observations and a conviction that no one should feel unseen in the body of Christ.

Several voices spoke about listening before acting: “*Our first stop should not be to impose solutions, listen first,*” and “*listen with humility, walk alongside is key.*” This recurring theme reveals a mature understanding of synodality — that the Church’s first mission is not to fix, but to accompany. The call to “*build rapport and trust, don’t come in with assumptions*” reinforces this relational approach.

A number of responses touched on outreach and engagement: “*practical approach – how can we get to disadvantaged communities, we don’t do much outreach,*” and “*reaching out on the street to First Nations people... may need more time there.*” These honest reflections call the Church to meet people where they are.

Hope and creativity also shine through the comments: “*food brings people together,*” “*one bite at a time,*” and “*don’t get disheartened.*” Beneath the fatigue lies resilience with an eagerness to take small, tangible steps toward community healing.

Young people and families emerged as vital concerns. Many respondents noted that “*the young don’t feel welcome,*” yet there is “*hope for the future in young people*” and a desire to “*embrace big, bold and courageous [ways] to engage young people.*” The suggestion to “*invite young people into conversation so they can engage*” speaks directly to the heart of synodality — inclusion, dialogue, and shared purpose.

Repeatedly, the responses return to faith, formation, and mission. “*Keep Eucharist at the centre,*” one wrote, while another urged “*formation in order to act.*” A recurring theme throughout the responses was not a reluctance to act, but rather a desire to do so from an informed position, where individuals feel equipped with the knowledge and resources needed to respond appropriately to challenging situations.

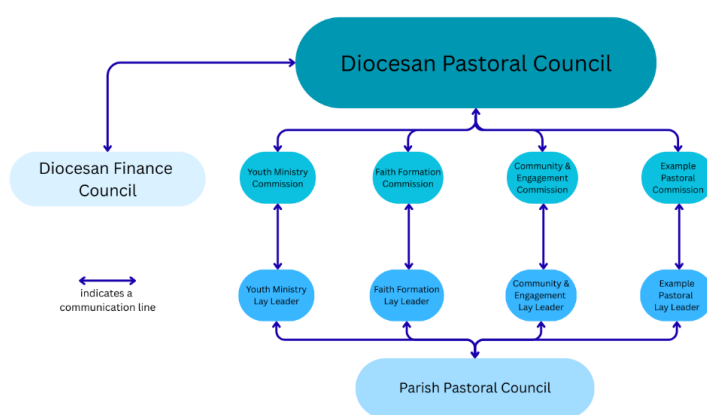
Others reminded us that “*everyone needs to take responsibility for action,*” and that the Church must be “*a serving and worshipping community.*” The closing notes are hopeful — calling for a Church that “*develop[s] a vibrant community with an outreach attitude based on faith,*” “*church of the poor for the poor,*” and “*formation to strengthen courage and action.*”

Taken together, these responses tell of a Church that knows its challenges but refuses to lose heart. It is a tapestry of realism, compassion, and faith, urging the Diocese to renew its visibility, listening, and courage in service of a missionary, synodal Church.



Compilation of Feedback to the Pastoral Consultation Framework

The second session of the day focused on the structural framework developed in response to feedback from the first Synod Members' meeting. The framework was presented as a diagram and accompanied by an explanatory presentation delivered by Synod Preparatory Commission members Anne Chellingworth and Vicki Bell, who provided context and clarification regarding its development and intended application.



Synod Members were asked to reflect on the following question: When considering the presented Pastoral Consultation Framework – What are the implications for your parish? What possible impediments might there be, and what solutions might be possible?

The reflections gathered reveal a Church aware of both its potential and its growing edges. There is an acknowledgment that transformation will require “*a cultural shift*”, not simply procedural change, but a re-imagining of how parish life and leadership are lived out.

Several comments recognised the limited role and formation of parish councils: “*Councils have been seen as advisory body or priest,*” and “*not well formed.*” These words echo a sense that consultation often stops short of shared discernment and decision-making. The statement “*no plan yet*” captures the waiting posture of many, willing, but unsure where to begin. It also reflects the sense that parishes often operate independently and may prefer to see successful examples elsewhere before initiating change themselves, if at all.

Groups expressed a practical awareness of diversity and capacity: “*multi-cultural communities,*” and that “*different purpose for parish – needs from Church e.g. just Eucharist.*” Such remarks reflect the challenge of serving communities that vary widely in size, culture, and expectation. They also highlight the need for contextual approaches rather than one-size-fits-all models.



The questions “*how often might the plan be reviewed*” and “*how can we involve more people and ensure greater commitment*” reflect a desire for accountability from those who would fulfill these roles. Respondents also raised practical considerations regarding potential costs to both the Diocese and individual parishes, the feasibility of the proposed timeline, and the level of diocesan support for any additional expenses that may arise. Practical concerns also surfaced: “*finding people willing to be involved*,” and the plea to “*avoid burnout*” recognising that we are asking more from people when life is so full. Making a commitment to community as well as family. These honest admissions remind leadership that enthusiasm must be matched with care, that sustainable ministry honours human limits.

There is a recognition that the framework’s strength lies in shared ownership. When people are genuinely included, empowered, and formed, councils can become engines of mission rather than formalities. The call for a “*cultural shift*” is ultimately a call to co-responsibility, with clergy and laity discerning together how best to serve in their own context.

The feedback tells us that people are not resistant to change; they are simply asking for clarity, support, and partnership. The framework is seen not as an endpoint, but as a working mission for deeper collaboration, ongoing formation, and participation in the Church’s mission.

Conclusion

The reflections gathered through this process highlight both the faith and commitment of the people of the Diocese of Cairns. Across the responses, there is a clear and consistent desire for a Church that listens deeply, acts compassionately, and walks together in genuine synodality.

The themes emerging from these conversations call us to continue building a culture of participation, transparency, and mission.

As we move forward, these insights will help to shape the next stages of the synodal journey within the Diocese. With gratitude for the dedication of all who contributed, we look ahead with trust that, through prayer and dialogue, the Spirit will continue to guide us in becoming the Church that Christ calls us to be — a Church of communion, participation, and mission.

May we continue to walk together with open hearts and listening spirits, allowing the love of Christ to lead us ever closer to one another and to the mission we share.

