

OUR SYNOD JOURNEY SO FAR

Listening, Collaboration, and Renewal



The Diocese of Cairns has had a productive and engaging year as we continue our Synod journey. Since the appointment of our Synod Members on Pentecost Sunday, we have been steadily progressing through a process designed to help us listen carefully, reflect deeply, and shape a shared vision for the future of our diocesan community.

In June, more than 230 Synod Members gathered in Cairns for our Opening Plenary. The day focused on prayer, structured conversations and attentive listening. Insights from these conversations formed our Plenary Consultation Synthesis, which highlighted key areas our communities wish to strengthen: The Life of Faith, Community & Engagement, Formation, Youth & Education, Parish Life, and the role of Parish Pastoral Councils. These themes have become the foundation for the work of our Synod Members over the last six months.

Our first Synod Members Meeting in August was guided by Anne Chellingworth and Adjunct Professor Susan Pascoe, who offered a clear and grounded overview of synodality and how it is being lived in diverse contexts. Anne also shared a significant story from her friend Kelly, a participant in the global Synod on Synodality, whose reflections on her experience of parenting a son with ADHD helped shape discussions at the international level. This session also introduced our members to the structural dimension of synodality, moving from broad aspirations toward practical pathways for strengthening diocesan processes.

At our second session, Bishop Joe delivered a keynote address encouraging members to consider how our Diocese can better understand and reach those whose voices are currently absent from parish life. Members also explored a proposed Pastoral Consultation Framework, which would see diocesan commissioners supporting parishes to develop initiatives that respond directly to the themes raised in the earlier consultation phase.

Our third gathering welcomed two experienced practitioners from outside our Diocese. Dr Chris Cotter, Director of Mission and Pastoral Life in the Diocese of Sandhurst, spoke about their recent synod process and their parish visitation program - an approach where the bishop spends several days within a parish community to gain a deeper understanding of its strengths and challenges. We also heard from Fr Josh Whitehead, Parish Priest at Our Lady of the Rosary, Caloundra, who shared the story of his parish's renewal efforts, highlighting the value of strong vision, collaborative leadership and reimagined parish structures.

Our Synod Members will meet twice more in the coming year before our Closing Plenary in May 2026. We look forward to the continued insights and practical outcomes of this journey as we work together to strengthen the mission and life of the Diocese of Cairns.



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