



Introduction

This document presents the key considerations, affirmations, and questions that emerged from the Fourth Synod Members Meeting. It draws together:

- the proposals and guiding questions provided to participants as stimulus for discernment, and
- the collective synthesis of table discussions.

General Observations from the Meeting

- There was support for all four proposals, with each table broadly accepting the proposals as presented.
- Feedback provided no substantive challenges to the direction or intent of the proposals.
- A consistent and notable concern raised by every table related to the role, visibility, communication, and accountability of Diocesan Agencies, particularly:
 - clarity about what the different diocesan agencies do,
 - how they communicate and report their work,
 - how they support parishes and one another, and
 - how they contribute to the implementation of diocesan pastoral priorities.

Proposal One: The Establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC)

Relationship Between the DPC and Parishes

Participants emphasised that the Diocesan Pastoral Council should relate to parishes in a manner that is:

- supportive rather than directive,
- synodal rather than managerial,
- visible and communicative, and
- respectful of parish autonomy and local discernment.

Key considerations included:

- The DPC should operate within a clearly articulated framework of priorities and principles, providing guidance and resources to Parish Pastoral Councils (PPCs).
- The Council should assist parishes to form and sustain effective, synodal PPCs, rather than replacing parish leadership.
- The DPC should be clearly seen as direction setting, not controlling.





Membership and Ways of Working

Members identified the importance of:

- a balanced and representative membership (including clergy and lay members)
- limited length of service with transparent selection and review processes
- Providing ongoing spiritual formation for members
- Respectful, responsible and synodal conduct of members
- meeting structures that are regular and purposeful
- a maximum number of sixteen (16) members

There was strong agreement that the DPC must be the voice of the whole Diocese, attentive to the diverse realities of parishes.

Qualities Desired in DPC Members

Commonly identified qualities included:

- deep listening and faithfulness
- active engagement in parish life
- openness to formation
- capacity to speak honestly and respectfully
- servant leadership
- Visionary thinking
- Ability to sit with diverse views, complexity and uncertainty.

The selection and appointment process is critical and must be transparent and credible.

Core Principles for the Work of the DPC

The following principles were strongly affirmed:

- consistency within and across parishes (a shared diocesan understanding of purpose and expectations, expressed locally)
- lay leadership as foundational to synodal life
- listening and discernment as the basis of consultation
- transparency and accountability.

Additional principles proposed for inclusion were:

- joy, celebration, and gratitude
- courage in decision making processes
- relevance to lived parish experience
- adequate resourcing
- formation in the life and structures of the Church
- explicit recognition of the Diocese's geographic, cultural, and pastoral diversity.
- structured two-way communication between the DPC and PPCs,
- strong formation processes





Proposal Two: Strategic Mission and Pastoral Goals

Affirmation of Focus Areas

The four proposed focus areas were broadly affirmed as reflecting what the Spirit has been saying through the Synod journey. Participants noted that:

- formation emerged as a particularly strong priority
- the focus areas are deeply interconnected
- strengthening parishes underpins all other priorities

Proposal Three: Walking with Parishes Through Implementation

Participants offered clear guidance on what it means for the Diocese to “walk with” parishes in practice.

Key Considerations

- Parishes should be met where they are, with responses shaped by local context
- The development of a dedicated parish support team to “walk with parishes”
- DPC and parish structures, reporting mechanisms, and expectations are explicit and consistent
- Clear articulation of what diocesan agencies do, and how parishes can access support, was identified as a major and urgent issue
- Regular and multichannel communication about diocesan priorities and progress is essential

Resourcing

Resourcing was understood broadly and included:

- access to skilled personnel
- formation and training
- clarity about available support
- the possible establishment of a Parish Support Team within the diocesan office





Proposal Four: The Parish Visitation Program

Participants responded very positively to the proposed Parish Visitation Program.

Anticipated Impact

The program was seen as likely to:

- build trust through visible listening
- strengthen relationships between parishes, DPC and the Bishop
- foster reflection, celebration, and renewal
- encourage lay engagement and synodal skills at parish level
- promote sharing of resources and learning across parishes

Questions for Further Clarification

Participants also raised practical questions for consideration, including:

- expectations of parishes during the process
- the nature and scope of parish reporting
- how data will be used
- alignment with a Diocesan Pastoral Plan
- involvement of diocesan agencies
- whether a pilot phase might be appropriate
- the extent of the Bishop's presence across parish communities.

Conclusion

The Fourth Synod Members Meeting demonstrated strong convergence around the proposed structures and priorities for the Diocese of Cairns. The considerations raised reflect a desire for:

- clarity of purpose
- meaningful change with a renewed focus on mission
- transparent and accountable structures
- genuine partnership between diocese and parishes
- formation driven, Spirit-led pastoral leadership

These reflections are offered to support the next phase of discernment and decision-making within the Synod journey.

