



AUSTRALIAN  
CATHOLIC BISHOPS  
CONFERENCE

SYNOD OF BISHOPS

# Australian Summary

2024 Consultation



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission



# AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

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The Australian Diocesan Testimonies from the 2024 Consultation are available from:  
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## Introduction

### Towards October 2024 - The Consultation Process in Australia

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1. The National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCP), supported by the Australian Synod of Bishops Working Group, planned consultations for the October 2024 Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) accepted the final proposal in January 2024. The consultation period ran from February to April 2024.
2. At the **local level**, groups reflected on three questions: *How can we enhance the differentiated co-responsibility in the mission of all the members of the People of God? What ways of relating, structures, processes of discernment and decision-making with regard to mission make it possible to recognise, shape, and promote co-responsibility? What ministries and participatory bodies can be renewed or introduced to better express this co-responsibility?* At the **national level**, groups reflected on the question: *How can the relations between Churches, between groupings of Churches at different levels and with the Bishop of Rome be creatively articulated in order to find “a dynamic balance between the dimension of the Church as a whole and its local roots”?* The NCP developed a suite of resources to support the consultations, including a Diocesan Roadmap ([Appendix A](#)), a Diocesan Reflection Guide ([Appendix B](#)) and a National Reflection Guide ([Appendix C](#)).
3. The NCP extended invitations to all Australian dioceses to participate in the local consultation supported by a Diocesan Contact Person, with responses received from 25 geographical dioceses and three Eastern Catholic Church eparchies. Groups were invited to focus on chapters 8-12, 16 and 18 of the *Synthesis Report*, although several chose to include other chapters as well. Dioceses submitted a Summary Report of their consultation and an (optional) two-page Testimony through a designated portal. For the national consultation, the ACBC invited 24 organisations to participate, of which 13 responded. Groups were invited to focus on chapters 13, 19 and 20 of the *Synthesis Report*. Several also focussed on other chapters aligned with their interests and ministries. All groups provided a Summary Report of their discussions. Based on the fruits of the summaries provided, the NCP developed this Australian Summary Report. The report was shared with the members of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference at their May plenary meeting.
4. Several groups expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to connect with others and listen to differing opinions in an environment of ‘sincere respect’. Others discussed how the synod process offered hope for the future of the Church. Some opined that the synodal process was of an enduring nature, not limited to a single consultation, and the recent reflection and consultation process ‘gave hope and determination to those who participated’. Groups also discussed some challenges with the synodal process. Several noted that consultations for the Plenary Council, diocesan synods and previous consultation phases of the Synod have led to ‘consultation fatigue’, leading to less engagement in later phases. The short timeframe of the 2024 consultation and the scheduling across the Lenten and Easter periods also caused difficulties. A few dioceses voiced challenges due to a lack of diocesan leadership. In one instance, this was partly due to the disbandment of key councils with the bishop’s departure and, in other cases, due to a lack of leadership to direct the process.

## Themes from the Local Consultation

### Synodality: Experience and Understanding

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5. Several groups noted the fruits of synodality in their churches and the growing acceptance of *Conversations in the Spirit*. The value of synodal processes being undertaken in the diocese and the resurgence of diocesan synods were also appreciated. Numerous groups affirmed *Synthesis Report* statements on ‘synodality’, including the need for greater clarification of the term and for increasing engagement by all, particularly clergy. Some noted that discernment and ‘letting the spirit in’ seemed strange to many. Synodality represented a change of focus or mindset that required an attitude of humility and welcoming of all. Greater formation on both the concept of synodality and its practice was acknowledged. Concerns were raised that the Synod’s work would not lead to significant change. It was also noted that it could take time and intentionality to move to a more synodal way of being Church.
6. Groups also raised other issues, such as the language and terminology of the *Synthesis Report*, with arguments that it was written in ‘church language’ that was inaccessible to many. Some Church documents referred to in the report were unfamiliar to Mass attendees. Some groups also advocated the use of inclusive language to reflect community diversity and equality, noting that some constructs, such as ‘family’, have broader connotations to 21st-century Australians. Others noted that those who identified as Catholic but did not engage with the Church needed to be heard. Some participants showed antagonism towards the Synod or indicated resistance by arguing that the synodal process failed to serve the outward mission of the Church due to its ‘inward focus’. There were concerns that ‘additional layers of bureaucracy’ through new structures could stifle mission. However, there was anticipation that the Second Session would unite the Church.

### Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church

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7. Most groups strongly agreed with Chapter 16 of the *Synthesis Report*, ‘Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church’. They emphasised the *Report’s* focus on deep, non-judgemental listening, particularly to young people and minority groups. There were calls to prioritise hearing from First Nations, LGBT and Church-abuse victims. Conversation was seen as a first step to conversion, with ‘prayer, fellowship and presence’ being crucial. Several groups said listening and accompanying did not mean agreeing with each other and that we should respect both our similarities and differences.
8. Groups acknowledged the need for face-to-face meetings, despite the value of online communication, especially in rural places. Several groups proposed intentionally creating environments and processes for meaningful conversations. Clear, frequent, unique and effective communication was key to fruitful relationships. Communication across Church levels was essential to inform and cross-fertilise ideas. Suggestions were also made for rebuilding trust. Groups recommended that the Church needed to acknowledge the past and allow those silenced to speak, as well as be open to accepting constructive criticism.
9. Several groups expressed discontent with multiple listening exercises for the Plenary Council and previous Synod consultations without significant action. Greater formation in listening and accompaniment skills was emphasised for all, particularly Church leaders. A few groups also had questions about discerning appropriately when faced with opposing views. Concerns were also raised about rigid interpretations of Church teaching that could exclude people from the Church.

10. Some groups advocated for a more 'outward-looking' approach to listen and accompany those who felt excluded or unwelcome, which included using inclusive language in Church documents. Some groups suggested avoiding labels like 'I am a divorcee' and 'I am an alcoholic' and using explicit terms such as 'LGBTIQ' to show that all were God's people. Several groups recommended that Church leaders meet people in the community rather than expecting them to walk into the church. The diaconate ministry was seen as being ideal to engage in community listening and accompaniment. Some groups identified schools or CatholicCare/Centacare as groups that accompanied families in crisis or grief. The Church was urged to listen to those already journeying with those on the margins to serve the community better and provide prayer and support.

### Prayer, Liturgy and Faith

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11. Several groups highlighted the role of prayer, both individually and in groups, as necessary for co-responsibility in the Church's mission. There was recognition of the need to be formed in how to pray and in various prayer methods and the importance of prayer as a spiritual skill. Groups spoke of the need to trust the Holy Spirit and seek God's guidance, especially in tensions between the complexities of everyday faith life and theological frameworks. Prayer and sacraments were crucial in discernment, as were openness, humility, and trust in God.

12. Inclusive language in liturgical texts, Church documents, and ministry materials was strongly advocated. This was vital for including men and women. Adjusting language would also help children, young people, local cultures, and multicultural groups. Theological concepts needed to be expressed in everyday language. Suggested lectionary revisions included more stories about women and removing irrelevant concepts. Inclusivity and accessibility needed to go beyond Eucharistic celebrations to include art, music, gestures and architecture. Some groups argued that traditions could limit liturgical accessibility and preferred a more open-minded approach.

13. Groups acknowledged the centrality of the Eucharist in Catholic worship and called for more engaging celebrations and Eucharistic devotions. This centrality was unfamiliar to many, and therefore, suggestions were made for greater formation and an understanding of the four-fold presence of Christ. Groups also recommended that initiation into the Church be a more central part of Church life. Improved liturgical models were recommended, such as more roles for lay people, normalising lay-led liturgies and expanding preaching to trained men and women. Other ideas included introducing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, strengthening the Mass's mystical dimension and holding Masses in other locations such as parks. Some groups suggested revising the Mass format and length, strengthening parish-school links in liturgy, music, and sacraments, and having a synodal process to approve 'authorised' music.

### Church is Mission

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14. As the Body of Christ is connected by many parts, several groups advocated for greater engagement and support of lay people, including those in leadership, beginning with diverse small group partnerships that could grow to form strong communities in mission. Synergy between lay and clergy was seen as paramount for mission. Several groups called for a deeper theological understanding of mission and updated canonical provisions to accommodate flexibility in governance to respond to missional needs, recognising local pastoral realities and complexities. Ensuring that key terms like 'mission' and 'ministry' were understood appropriately and having a clear mission focus across geographical boundaries was deemed important. The Plenary Council's *Mission and Evangelisation* document was suggested to clarify terminology, as Chapter 8 of the *Synthesis Report* focussed more on ministry than mission.

15. Numerous groups recognised the need to enhance Catholic social services, health services and overseas mission. Authenticity through a shared commitment to proclaiming the Good News was seen as important. Mission was the responsibility of the whole Church and part of daily life, not only for Mass. Furthermore, it was more than just words and involved Gospel sharing through actions. Some groups included volunteering through acts of service as part of mission but recommended reviewing traditional models. There was recognition that many already serve in mission in their families, education or employment and may not be able to engage further in local parishes.

16. Some groups emphasised the value of physical gatherings to nurture community, which could be wide-ranging and not necessarily faith-based and could increase Church outreach and involvement among marginalised groups. More lay encouragement was proposed to build connections, although a challenge was drawing disparate experiences and life journeys together as one community in mission. People could be called to a shared responsibility of mission through conversion and an encounter with Christ, encouraging them to intentionally live out their baptismal call. There was much agreement that all the baptised are charged with 'making disciples', which is the essence of the Church's existence, and that this should spread to others beyond the Church.

17. It was noted that misunderstandings and misinformation have led to people feeling unwelcome, and therefore, several advocated for a welcoming and inclusive Church without closed doors that would be a healing space for all. This could be done through authentic hospitality and a culture of invitation within all faith communities, which could improve a sense of belonging. Small Christian communities were seen as opportunities for life-sharing and enriching spaces of welcome.

18. One group noted that poverty is still prevalent, but Catholics have fewer opportunities to encounter disadvantaged people due to the outsourcing of services to agencies. More connections between local churches and Catholic agencies could improve opportunities for encounters. Two examples of involving people on the margins were *Curious Grace*, designed to build long-term relationships between parishioners and marginalised persons, and *The City Compass* initiative in Sydney, which engaged with young workers. Ecological stewardship was also seen as integral to the Church's mission, and recommendations were made to explicitly integrate it into Church teaching, liturgies and practice. Recent environmental disasters in Australia were seen as reminders of everyone's responsibility for mission.

19. The changing nature of the Catholic Church in Australia through migration was acknowledged by multiple groups. One group wondered how to foster communion amidst diverse religious expressions and expectations, including among overseas clergy ministering in Australia. Overcoming language and cultural barriers that restrict migrants' involvement in the local Church was a challenge. A few groups identified possibilities through effective formation, awareness, openness, and listening, as well as opportunities for different groups to come together and patience to allow full participation to develop. Supporting occasions for mutual celebrations, including Mass and significant events, and encouraging the involvement of all cultural groups in the mission of the Church were also supported.

## Mission in the Digital Environment

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20. Intentional thinking and strategic planning for digital media engagement in the Church's mission were strongly recommended. Groups urged using available technology to reach non-Catholics and the marginalised. The discomfort of many 'in the pews' who found this engagement difficult was recognised. However, social media was seen as a powerful tool, with one group describing it as a 'digital table of encounter' for many people, particularly youth. Digital mission was advocated as a mandatory aspect of evangelising communication. The Church could harness its potential to enhance people's faith through resources and support networks. Some groups wondered how much study and theological reflection had been done on the digital world and the Church's role in it. Some argued that digital media need to stay faithful to Catholic tradition but also be cognisant of Australia's digital audiences.

21. Mission in the digital space enabled engagement with Catholic content. One important challenge was moving people from the online environment to 'real world' engagement to avoid diminished physical engagement. COVID-19 was seen as a catalyst for creative and innovative opportunities. A renewed communications ministry could allow authentic recognition and acknowledgement for many who failed to connect otherwise. Developing a robust social media strategy that could utilise digital tools for evangelisation was paramount, as was guiding responsible and ethical engagement in the online environment.

## Evangelisation to Families and Young People

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22. A few groups noted that parishes usually provide evangelisation opportunities for older people who form the majority of the worshipping community. However, families, single adults, young people, and children needed to be encouraged to participate and be involved. Promoting the lived expression of Catholic Social Teaching was one way to encourage participation. Another way was to provide more intergenerational experiences so minority groups could feel a sense of belonging. Groups offered suggestions for various initiatives to make the Church a place of welcome and belonging for all, regardless of age or circumstance.

23. A few groups believed that young people left the Catholic Church for other Christian churches to join groups of similar age and culture. These people still had a deep sense of faith but could not find it in the Catholic liturgy and parish community. It was widely accepted that youth ministries should welcome marginalised, non-practising or non-Catholic youth as part of the Church's mission.

24. Numerous groups emphasised the importance of supporting all types of families as the basic unit of society. There was recognition that faith development begins in the family, where it is transmitted. More support was needed to help pass on faith to children and grandchildren. Cross-generational catechism in baptism preparation, marriage, and sacramental programs, was also suggested. More clarity was sought around the role of Catholic schools in engaging students and their families. Some groups acknowledged that Catholic schools played a key role in evangelising young people, serving the marginalised, and proclaiming the Good News, which helped nourish faith. Renewing and deepening church-school partnerships could lead to better expressions of co-responsibility for mission.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

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25. The importance of staying informed and being proactive about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and ongoing reconciliation was supported. This could include more participation and intentionality in listening and accompanying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics. One group highlighted the fact that there was currently no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in ordained ministry, and more focus was needed on developing leaders in these communities, both lay and ordained. A few other groups suggested more resources for forming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics, noting that the people in these communities should be encouraged to express their Catholic faith through their own cultural lens by exercising and imparting their experiences and knowledge.

## A Synodal Approach to Formation

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26. Several groups stressed the significance of lifelong formation for all Catholics to foster growth in faith and suggested that the Church create a greater culture of formation. The importance of forming the laity, priests, bishops, deacons, seminarians, catechists and other ministers in areas of co-responsibility and collaboration was emphasised. Appropriate formation was seen as vital to ensure a greater understanding of everyone's equal baptismal responsibility and was seen as critical to the Church's evangelising mission. A lack of formation was seen as an 'obstacle' and as reluctance to engage in synodality and mission. Despite some groups requesting clarity around the term 'formation' and approaching formation synodally, many agreed that a relationship with Christ was central, and more opportunities were needed to enable people to understand their calling. Many groups identified the close link between formation and faith development or education, although one group stressed that both contributed more than just sharing information.

27. Groups advocated for synodal principles to guide pastoral and governance formation at all Church levels. Leadership formation for all Church leaders, lay and clerical, was critical, and it was proposed that clergy share in the same formation as lay people. Formation for the lay members who are deeply dedicated to their various vocations was also important. Some groups called for intercultural formation for overseas clergy, noting that in the past, there were significant deficiencies.

28. Several groups saw an urgent need to rethink the formation of clergy and seminarians. They called for reviewing seminary formation in the light of synodality, which must include lay women and men, and for greater formation in the areas of transparency, accountability, and involvement of the laity in ministry. One group advised seminarians to spend time immersed in parishes before entering the seminary. Others argued that seminarians needed time to build relationships with each other and deepen their relationship with God.

## Gifts, Skills and Charisms

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29. There was great agreement that each person had unique gifts for mission by virtue of their baptism. Several spoke about the 'equality and dignity' of all, while also recognising the diversity of the Church community. Recognising different strengths and charisms, especially among the laity, was emphasised. The unique gifts of migrants were recognised, as was the richness of religious and lay groups within local communities. Groups insisted that lay members be treated equally in the Church. Some groups cautioned against using lay members as substitutes for clergy where numbers were low but nevertheless, suggested that some lay members may have ministerial callings and should be recognised for their contribution. Several groups stressed the importance of recognising and appreciating the many roles lay members undertake in the Church community.

**30.** A better understanding of individual gifts and charisms was seen as paramount. Some groups voiced a need to help the faithful to better discern their gifts, using programs such as 'Called and Gifted'. Others stressed the need for Church leaders to recognise and acknowledge individual gifts and strengths for the Church's mission. Also important was aligning people with their specific gifts and charisms to help prevent frustration and burnout. Some groups believed that gift discernment should be linked with sacraments of initiation, such as Confirmation or the RCIA program, and should flow from baptism. Accompaniment or mentorship following initiation was suggested to help people identify and grow in their charisms.

**31.** Ongoing encouragement and nurturing to use individual gifts in service was considered important, as was the need for individuals to be placed in roles that suited them best. Some groups suggested that formalised roles, such as candle bearer, reader and subdeacon, be available to the laity. Other roles for laity included pastoral work, teaching, preaching, chaplaincy, liturgical music, sacristy duties, permanent catechists, acolytes, and legal experts. Some people's gifts and charisms were best employed beyond the parish church, in schools or other environments. Ensuring equal opportunities for men and women to serve in the Church was important. It was noted that while women's roles have had a particular focus (see the following section), lay men also needed to be supported to participate at home and in the Church. Lay associations and religious congregations were recognised for their work in developing and forming particular charisms. It was suggested that religious congregations could further share how their charism helped inform their structures. Members of religious congregations were encouraged to follow the charisms of their founders. There was also a need expressed for clarification of the relations between 'the bishop, religious and institutes of consecrated life'.

### Women in the Life and Mission of the Church

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**32.** Numerous groups agreed with Chapter 9 of the *Synthesis Report* on the equal dignity and role of women in the Church's life, mission, and ministry. The equal dignity of women and men in visible leadership roles within liturgical and governance structures and ministries of the Church was strongly urged to improve mission efficacy and the Church's credibility in the world. The possibility of women being admitted to the diaconate was seen as a sign of hope by many groups, with widespread agreement across many geographical dioceses. Suggestions were made for dioceses to prepare ahead if this were approved by the Holy See and to consider formation and diaconate programs for women. A few groups also requested that Canon Law be revised to grant women access to priestly ordination. Eastern Churches voiced their inability to support women's ordination to the diaconate but strongly advocated for women as lectors, catechists, and workers in Church courts and other Church structures. One group also highlighted the indispensable role of wives of married clergy and voiced a need for greater acknowledgment of their ministry.

**33.** Some groups noted the *Synthesis Report* lacked adequate treatment of the roles of women as mother and spouse and the role of family life and motherhood as vocations flowing from baptism. They noted that assigning attributes to women as a whole could overlook the giftedness of each person. It was acknowledged that many women prefer to work at a local level and should be supported in doing so and that not all women are called to leadership. Several groups voiced a need to ensure women have access to the roles they are already capable of fulfilling, including lectors, acolytes and catechists. Some suggested expanding these ministries to allow for more leadership opportunities for women. Several suggestions were made to acknowledge women's contributions, including celebrating women, past, present, and future, increasing opportunities to hear their voices and for them to preach, greater research to identify opportunities for women to minister alongside priests, inclusive language and committing to gender equality in leadership roles.

### Deacons, Priests and Bishops in a Synodal Church

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**34.** Several groups posited that priesthood should not be about power or prestige but rather about accountability, transparency and a commitment to collaboration with the bishop and lay people in the Church's mission. The behaviour and performance of priests were vital to parish viability, and one group noted that parish administration changes could undo previous good works, as could the retirement of a bishop when implementing initiatives in the local Church. Some groups reflected on the future clergy roles as Mass attendance diminished and fewer people were involved in parishes. It was noted that often, there were too many unrealistic leadership and management expectations placed on a local parish priest, and clearer clergy role definitions would be beneficial. Other groups suggested prayerful discernment was most important in considering any role modifications and that such reform should be more egalitarian and embrace servant leadership principles.

**35.** Some groups argued that the Catholic Church in Australia underutilises the diaconate, despite its unique assets and importance for future pastoral leadership. It was suggested that the Eastern Churches have long understood the diaconate first as a permanent order rather than a path to priesthood, and a deacon's role in the Church was a good example of co-responsibility. Some responses called for mutual respect and greater formation to ensure cooperation and co-responsibility among permanent deacons and priests.

**36.** A few groups advocated for urgent obligatory celibacy, while others emphasised honouring the gift of celibacy while recognising practical realities. Importantly, groups advocated for theological and financial issues to be considered in all discussions. Clerical loneliness and isolation were seen by some as the side effects of celibacy, and recommendations were made to address these through mentoring and supervision for all clergy and parish-wide assessments. Several groups argued that clericalism presented a significant challenge as it prevented lay people from full participation due to doubt, fear or lack of formation. It could also prevent clergy involvement in mission. Clericalism was complex, as it could stem from people's expectations, and clergy and lay people needed to appreciate each other's complementing roles in mission.

**37.** The bishop's role had changed significantly over time in Australia. Groups struggled to define a bishop's role and develop structures for review. They noted that the roles and responsibilities of teaching, governing and sanctifying were important, alongside a bishop's relationship with people in the local church. Bishops could play a significant role in establishing a culture of synodality. However, the bishop needed people's support and synodal collaboration to undertake the mission. A local document, *Fishing for Souls & Feeding the Flock*, was suggested as a template for reinvigorating collaboration between clergy and laity. Another group called for recognition that the bishop's role could be an 'impossible burden' of leadership, especially in management.

### Governance and Co-responsibility

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**38.** Many agreed that co-responsibility between the laity and clergy was essential for synodality and the Church's mission, and developing differentiated co-responsibility was crucial to all. Some clarifications of 'co-responsibility' were requested, with one group noting that 'a



discipleship of equals', 'co-responsibility' and 'a Church of listening and encounter' were aspirational terms with little ground reality. Trust between groups was needed to apply Catholic Social Teaching principles, especially subsidiarity. Understanding the different roles of complementary agencies and establishing good communication, coordination and accountability was emphasised. Recognising parishioners when they began new roles of ministry could provide greater clarity and legitimacy. One diocese noticed a shift in the way lay people were responding to their baptismal vocation as their responses showed a willingness to act rather than seek permission or wait for third parties to respond.

39. A chief concern was whether priests could relinquish some of their personal responsibilities and whether they had to approve everything before implementing actions. Authentic co-responsibility needed clergy and laity to engage, learn and act together. One group noted that while supporting lay people's 'gifts', Church leadership also had to be comfortable with 'fragilities' to embrace the complex realities of people's lives. Support was also needed for lay associations and movements that facilitated co-responsibility for lay people.

40. The barriers to co-responsibility included the freedom to try new approaches without fear of punishment, increasing secularism, migrants' religious practices and expectations, a lack of lay people willing to provide deep accompaniment, lay leaders clinging to ministerial roles or having too many roles, and meeting and training times that favoured the participation of retirees or those in Church employment while alienating full-time workers, parents and youth. Concerns were expressed about adequate resourcing, while others struggled with succession planning for future leadership. The attitude of the laity simply deferring to the priest's stated views was seen as unhelpful. Some felt undervalued due to the 'veto power' parish priests wielded over decision-making. Too many demands on one individual could lead to burnout or disillusionment, and too many participatory bodies could devolve into 'talkfests' with no action. Groups also raised concerns about theological divisions in dioceses, with diverse theological understandings, spiritual elitism and interpretations of Church teachings that were perceived as rigid, stifling dialogue and engagement. Some suggested using the theological approach advocated in Pope Francis' 2023 Motu Proprio *Ad Theologiam Promovendam* (Promoting Theology) to bring experience into dialogue with tradition, changing Canon Law to mirror civil laws, and revising Canons so that better diocesan processes are employed during a *sede vacante*.

41. There was a wide variety of proposals to promote greater co-responsibility, differing by diocese, context, ministry and levels of Church governance. Recommendations for initiatives in parishes included enhancing pastoral, outreach and mission activities, using tools such as *Divine Renovation*, and promoting mechanisms such as a 'parish in council' model to involve the entire community in discernment and decision-making. Also, electing people for leadership positions and promoting the growth of small parish or neighbourhood groups to promote trust, fellowship, and joint mission action amongst the laity. Fostering a shared vision and knowledge of the Church with clearly defined duties and responsibilities could strengthen church-school relations.

42. Recommendations for initiatives at the diocesan level included promoting shared lay-led ministries with inclusive decision-making processes across the diocese, establishing a clear diocesan policy of synodality and co-responsibility, integrating Catholic education and outreach agencies within parish and diocesan ministries, and investigating the revival of sodalities and university chaplaincies as ministries. Professional supervision and periodic reviews for priests, as well as equipping youth and young adults for parish leadership roles, were also suggested. Sharing positive experiences of co-responsibility was important. Regular discussions at parish or diocesan levels for leadership teams could increase collaboration and learning from best practices. and episcopal appointments. Other suggestions included involving the laity in the selection and appraisal of clergy, and adopting an ethical culture, strong risk management practices, and effective communication. Also important was ensuring integrity, accountability and transparency were reflected in all Church administrative and governance practices.

### Renewal of Governance Structures

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43. Various groups advocated for dioceses to examine appropriate governance methods for canonical, pastoral, safeguarding, and civil purposes to benefit the community. Diocesan bodies, such as the College of Consultors, the Council of Priests, the Clergy Appointments Board, the Diocesan Curia, and the Diocesan Finance Committee, were recommended to include lay, clergy and religious in their membership. One group cited *The Light from the Southern Cross* to urge for a synodal, collaborative reorganisation of the Church's governing structure. Another proposed that Catholics have recourse to accessible and effective appeal processes if they believed Church leaders had not behaved in a synodal manner.

44. Most groups supported new diocesan structures for lay and clergy co-responsibility, although implementation varied widely. Some challenges included the aging profile of the Catholic population and clergy, diverse local contexts influencing mission, unique characteristics of rural parishes with small populations, impacts of clericalism, cultural differences between priests and laity, impacts of the abuse crisis on clergy morale and trust in the Church, and tensions between mission and financial viability. A few groups cautioned against 'bureaucratising co-responsibility' and hasty governance restructuring and emphasised the Church's mission to transform the world. Spiritual conversion was seen as the foundation of any effective structural change.

45. Recommendations for Diocesan and Parish Pastoral Councils include ensuring cultural diversity, establishing needs-based ministries, decision-making power and strategic planning. Some dioceses supported deanery-based councils. The Syro-Malabar General Assembly was offered as one model of a consultative and participatory decision-making process in the parish. Views on membership differed, with some suggesting a representative body with members drawn from key roles and ministries and others opting for a 'gifts and skills'-based approach. Some sought clarity on how councils could intersect with each other and other diocesan ministries. Others noted the importance of developing, enacting, reviewing, and reporting on pastoral plans, and inviting community input. Many groups also supported holding diocesan synods and assemblies. Some groups proposed formalising and legalising diocesan synodal processes to make them permanent.

### The Eastern Churches and Latin Church Traditions

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46. The Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia were grateful for the support and welcome they received in a new country. They highlighted their strengths, such as emphasising community engagement that could contribute to Australian spirituality. They also admitted to being 'relatively obscure and unknown to many' or being known only by name, rather than more deeply. They expressed a desire for greater collaboration between their traditions and that of the Latin rite. Sharing spiritual events and historical insights behind liturgical practices could increase knowledge and solidify relationships. This collaboration could assist the development of shared resources and other initiatives for the evangelisation of the wider Australian population.

47. Suggestions to increase collaboration between the Eastern Catholic and the Latin-rite Churches included seminaries and theological colleges including 'for-credit' units on Eastern Catholic Churches and Eastern Catholic priests offering teaching services or formation classes. Seminarians could attend liturgies at the Eastern Catholic Churches for 'exposure and catechesis', and information on the Eastern Catholic Churches could be included in Australian Catholic school curricula. Priests of different rites concelebrating at events in seminaries, parishes and schools and Eastern Catholic priests becoming hospital and university chaplains were suggested. It was noted that, although a resource was offered to assist Latin-rite priests in ministering to Eastern Catholics, there was no reciprocal resource assisting Eastern Catholic priests in ministering to Latin-rite Catholics. Questions were also raised on the need for bi-ritual faculties, particularly in administering sacraments of healing. A recommendation was made to allow Eastern Churches' Synod, '*Sui Iuris*', to have full jurisdiction over the entire territory of their Church and the right to establish dioceses or exarchates throughout the territory of residence of their faithful.

### On the Road Towards Unity

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48. Several groups emphasised the importance of ecumenical dialogue in contemporary Australia. They suggested that local churches seek opportunities for dialogue and collaboration, encouraging local action and relationship-building with other Christian denominations. Shared liturgies, prayer events and other celebrations were examples of initiatives proven to build positive ecumenical relationships. The 'receptive ecumenism' approach, which encourages genuine listening and a willingness to learn, could enable solidarity with other Christians and the opportunity to speak to society with a united voice.

49. Some groups prioritised interfaith education, promotion, and formation for synodal Churches, as well as Catholic involvement in secular activities, such as through environmental activities, social justice groups or 'Spirituality in the Pub' initiatives. These were recognised as highly relevant and very effective evangelisation activities. There was also recognition of the need to be continually aware of and respectfully responsive to local community or wider international issues to build solidarity with people of other faith and no faith. Some saw interreligious dialogue as important to the synodal journey because it allowed for a glimpse beyond 'our own certainties' and to see God's spirit in others. Eastern Catholic Churches held significant potential in engaging in such dialogue due to their position among people from other cultural backgrounds and faith traditions.

## Themes from the National Consultation

### Relationship between the Bishop of Rome and the College of Bishops

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50. Groups recognised the importance of the role of the Pope as the guarantor and protector of the faith and the unity of the universal Church. However, there was a need for increased communication between the local and universal Churches to improve synodality and collegiality and enhance relations at all levels. Suggestions were offered for effective two-way communication that embodied principles of honesty, transparency, stewardship and subsidiarity, as well as desires to listen to and engage with diverse views

51. *Ad Limina* visits were seen as an important way to strengthen relationships. The new dynamic of the visits in recent years, which included fruitful exchanges with the Pope and the Dicastries, influenced by engagement with local Church reports, was appreciated. Commitment from local Church leaders (e.g. the Bishops Conference, Congregational Leaders, MPJP Trustees) and members of Dicastries was seen as vital in improving connections, and suggestions included revisiting the practice of regular contact between the Conference President and Dicastries, ensuring the *Ad Limina* meeting had adequate time for raising issues with Dicastries and bringing previous discussions into conversations with the Pope, and visits by Dicastery members to Australia to improve their understanding of the local Church.

52. A recommendation was made about the involvement of ordained clergy in Curial appointments, that this work be viewed as extraordinary and temporary, with limited and non-consecutive terms so priests could return to their local Church for interim pastoral appointments. Two challenges were highlighted that were indicative of the tensions between synodality, collegiality and primacy: the delay in the promulgation of the Plenary Council decrees and the process of the third edition of the English translation of the Roman Missal, which had translation inadequacies, and in which participants were treated poorly by the Curia. These were cited as examples of a need to address the intentional empowering of local Churches to respond to local needs.

### Decentralisation and Subsidiarity

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53. Decentralisation of structures from the Holy See to the peripheries was recognised as important, with the need for solutions to emerge organically. The reform of the Curia and the implementation of subsidiarity were crucial for deepening synodality. An example of this was in liturgical matters, where Episcopal Conferences play a key role, and the Dicastery for Divine Worship has a supportive and co-responsible role of preserving communion while allowing local expressions to flourish. It was noted, however, that a separation still exists between the liturgy being a means to establish uniformity and a call for unity and diversity following the principles of Vatican II. An inherent assumption recognised in the exercise of episcopal ministry was that bishops are fully involved pastorally and can carry the hopes and visions of all within a synodal Church. Further decentralisation of power was recommended for transformational voices from the margins to be heard and to enable the vision of a synodal Church to become a reality.

### Deepening Ecumenical Relationships

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54. Leaders of various denominational churches expressed gratitude for being invited to join the synodal journey, and celebrating these churches' unity amid great diversity was seen positively. There was also an appreciation for allowing greater reflection on Eucharistic hospitality beyond inter-church marriages. However, a need for deeper ecumenical unity was expressed, and several proposals were made to improve ecumenical relationships and to enrich exchanges with leaders reflecting together.

55. The Pope's exercise of primacy posed a challenge to understanding the concept of synodality in the ecumenical journey. Noting that universal primacy is unique to the Catholic Church, a question was raised about the relationship between synodality and primacy. Ecumenical groups voiced concerns about how primacy might impact decision-making and legislative authority and interfere with local Church decisions. There were two suggestions made: one, to ensure that the understanding of primacy developed from the experience of the local Church and the communion of local churches, which then could influence how synodality was understood and practised, and two, to invite and publish responses about the exercise of primacy from other Churches and ecumenical dialogues to deepen this concept further.

## Groupings of Churches within the Communion of the Whole Church

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56. The unique and changing cultural context of the Catholic Church in Australia was seen as a starting point for understanding existing ecclesial structures in Australia and where and how reform was needed. The cultural shift from a predominantly Anglo-Celtic background to a multicultural Church presented challenges and opportunities. One group noted that Australian Catholic 'roots' were shallow compared to Europe and other countries, where 'geography, landmarks and evidence of the saints' are constant reminders of the faith of our predecessors. There was a need, therefore, to identify Australia's own saints and continue the journey afresh.

57. There was agreement with the *Synthesis Report's* suggestion to consult the experience of Eastern Churches in exercising synodality and to research the structures of the first millennium to understand how these may be useful within the current canonical order. A further suggestion included learning from ecumenical insights. There were differing opinions about the *Synthesis Report's* proposal of recovering the structure of the metropolitan *See*. One group endorsed the suggestion, noting that it could help develop mechanisms for more effective collegiality, oversight and accountability through the ecclesiastical province. Another group noted that ecclesial provinces in Australia already cooperate and interact well, and there was concern that a proliferation of structures between individual Bishops and the Holy See could increase centralisation.

58. Enhancing the role of the Bishops Conference in enabling collegial action was deemed important, although it was suggested that care be taken to ensure that the independent role and pastoral responsibility of individual bishops was not diminished or erased. It was also recommended to make more visible the synodal dimensions of the Conference's work (including its Commissions and Councils) by enhancing ways in which lay people, religious, deacons and priests could contribute to it.

59. There was discussion on improving the understanding of the Church's synodal dimension. One group perceived the concept of the Church expressed in the *Synthesis Report* as too traditional, as it failed to grapple with contemporary realities. Proposals for newer ecclesial models that could enable a more relational understanding included one that held the Petrine principle in creative tension with the Marian principle – visually a pyramid contained within a sphere, the 'house church' model of Romans 16, which naturally engages women and men as leaders, and an idea of Church as a communion of local churches.

## The Synod of Bishops and Ecclesial Assemblies

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60. The experience of participating in a synodal Church was welcomed, with groups appreciating opportunities to deepen ecumenical relations, foster a culture of co-responsibility in Church governance, reflect on ways of being Church and consider the health of decision-making and making Holy Spirit-led decisions. Several challenges associated with synodality were highlighted. At national and universal levels, the practicalities of holding large, open consultations with no clear frameworks were questioned, which, while fostering a sense of participation, could lead to disillusionment as individual contributions are lost in the multitude of responses of varying opinions, focus and quality. Another issue relating to the movement of the Synod from event to process was the lack of clarity on how synodality would be incorporated into the Church's institutional processes and structures as an ongoing process. There was also concern that adding too many structures between bishops and laity could diminish participation by detracting from the immediacy of access and sacramental encounter.

## Consultative Decision-making

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61. Church structures and policies needed to reflect the baptismal equality and familial reality of the People of God. Consultative participation and decision-making were seen to be vital for lay people to fulfil their roles in parish, diocesan, national, regional or international Church ministry, whatever their level of involvement and responsibility. Promoting the art of spiritual conversations widely was highlighted to strengthen authentic discernment and decision-making, with the suggestion that this could help Pastoral Councils move from being job-focused to implementing a vision for the local Church.

62. One area where consultative decision-making could be improved was in diocesan pastoral planning and restructuring decisions, which needed to take into consideration the history and 'faith story' of the community and refrain from being dominated by a corporate mindset. A suggestion was made for further research into the synodal practices of religious congregations, many of whom had integrated relational discernment processes into their decision-making mechanisms. The value of diversity and collective discernment in addressing the challenges and opportunities facing the Church was also recognised by parents as being crucial to teaching children about the importance of respecting diverse viewpoints and actively participating in the Church.

## Encouraging Engagement Locally

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63. There was widespread agreement on the need to emphasise the significance of baptism and co-responsibility for mission. The conversation about co-responsibility needed to be done in a spirit of love with a natural tension with legal frameworks. The development of the Ministerial PJs in Australia was offered as an example of transformation, although it was noted that revisions of Canon Law (particularly Canons 129, 228 and 274) were required to enhance their participation further. A number of groups suggested formation proposals similar to those proposed in the Local Consultation (see 'A Synodal Approach to Formation' section).

64. Suggestions for accessible and appropriate formation included formation at the local level, cultural training, simplified language, a focus on the *kerygma* and 'accreditation' processes to ensure that all Church workers operate in a Gospel manner. Liturgical formation was also seen as a priority to enable a full understanding of liturgical history and norms. It was suggested that the local and universal Church invest in post-graduate level training of lay people who could then facilitate liturgical formation at various levels.

65. A healthy spiritual life, grounded in prayer and Scripture was seen as important to develop virtues, to help people follow callings of faith and for synodality to be embodied in external works, ministries and structures. A proposal was made for male and female Scripture scholars to provide input in Church consultative processes and in Catholic formation processes. Church agencies highlighted the importance of the spiritual health of members and clients, whether functional or not, and the need to invite people to foster spiritual growth. For the wider community, a suggestion was made for the Church to develop strategies to help people develop a clearer understanding of religion and a better understanding of the spiritual dimension of life.

66. Many groups advocated for greater participation of women, including opening the diaconal ministry and priestly ordination to women, and one suggested de-clericalising the honorary role of Cardinal to make it accessible to women. The *Great Women of Faith Art Exhibition* in

Melbourne's Cathedral was an example of how modern art could be used to reflect on the inner life and personhood of the women featured and stimulate discussion of Pope John Paul II's writing on the female genius.

67. In matters relating to the clergy, the role of overseas priests serving the Catholic Church in Australia was acknowledged. A proposal was made to remove constraints around priests being able to marry in the hope that this could lead to more Australian vocations. Concern was expressed that outreach to parishioners greatly depended on the attitude of the parish priest, and the experience varied considerably. Appropriate cultural training was emphasised, and priests were encouraged to work within the diocesan parameters of accountability.

### Building Relationships

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68. Intentionally building relationships across groups and levels was seen as critical for a more synodal Church. The multitude of vocations, ministries and offices in the Catholic Church in Australia provided great potential for appreciating differences and affirming diverse cultures and traditions. Many groups saw this as an opportunity to increase co-responsibility and allow everyone to rediscover their unique contribution to the communion as a whole. One example provided was the significant proportion of healthcare workers who embody the care and compassion of the Gospels in their daily work. Supporting their active engagement in faith could facilitate a richer journey. A greater inclusion of marginalised groups, particularly women and ethnic minorities, was identified as a priority, as was the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. One group noted, however, that the idea of including women as a marginalised group was confusing as it left 50 per cent of Catholics 'feeling like spectators'. Rather than just including marginalised groups, therefore, it was important to embrace them for their unique contributions.

69. Church traditions were perceived by some as both a strength and a weakness, with a need expressed for more hope-filled confidence through embracing change that could result in a robust shared vision. It was noted, however, that this was contingent on local Church leadership, active and genuine engagement of clergy (deacons, priests and bishops), and the spirit of embracing the other. Invitation, conversation, and dialogue were key elements proposed in building relationships, as well as a greater acknowledgement and respect for diverse roles and the ability to manage conflicts constructively. Relationships needed to reflect the history and future of the Church's commitment to the Gospels and be active, enduring, and adaptable to emerging needs.

70. Groups emphasised the importance of authentic communication from the Church to the world. Two-way regular communication that avoided judgement and encouraged participation was at the heart of building relationships. It was important for the Church to effectively communicate who they are and why their presence matters in society with a consistent, transparent and easy-to-understand narrative. Church agencies informing donors about achievements was another approach to 'own the mission'.

71. At the parish level, encouraging active engagement was crucial for building community. Gathering for the Sunday Eucharist was seen as a synodal experience of walking together. A genuine welcome, simpler and user-friendly language, truly participatory liturgies, diocesan-wide parameters for parish outreach and personalised financial giving were suggestions to increase engagement. Inculturated liturgy was suggested as a means to express cultural diversity.

### Accompanying those on the margins

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72. Pope Francis' emphasis on the dignity of the human person and accompanying those on the margins were common themes. The negative well-being impacts of COVID-19, toxic individualism and media-inspired anxieties of death and tragedy were current challenges faced by people who could benefit from hearing the Church's messages of hope. Developing spiritual attitudes was necessary for spiritual growth in local communities, and measuring the common good rather than public good could ensure that individuals were not overlooked.

73. Moving from the centre of the Church to the margins could instil a sense of fear and vulnerability in laity, religious, priests and bishops. One suggestion was to articulate a framework for accompaniment at the local level, with goals and operative processes and the scope and limitations of accompaniment for Christians, particularly in areas of health and healthcare. Other suggestions included walking with those in the LGBT community, using the Ethics of Care that focuses on encouraging engagement and accompaniment and centring the narrative on the Good News. 'Travel toward life and death' was an example of a topic for accompaniment to help people prepare for death, challenge euthanasia and bring one's relationship with Christ into the journey of accompanying others.

74. Listening and dialogue were keys to accompaniment, with a collective 'we' conversation that included those being missioned to and those who mission to us. The need to maximise occasions for personal encounters was raised by one group, where members noted that their mainly academic work hampered opportunities to engage in conversations and connect with others. Effective synodality also depended on personal conversion which involved listening to others' experiences and struggles and enduring them as we ourselves changed. Moral humility was needed to listen impartially and moral courage to do the right thing, no matter what.

## Conclusion

75. While a synodal culture has been introduced into the Catholic Church of Australia for a few years now, there are still growing pains associated with this significant paradigm shift in our way of being Church. Many groups offered their reflections on the deep listening to each other and to the Holy Spirit, which occurred as a result of spiritual conversations and noted the sincere respect that came with doing so. The proposals and recommendations offered through this consultation covered the broad diversity of cultures, circumstances and experiences that exist within a country like Australia.

76. Much of the *Synthesis Report* was met with endorsement and approval by groups, noting that the views previously offered had been represented therein. However, groups indicated that there was still more work to be done. There was a significant call for action to follow these times of reflection and sharing, particularly with regard to the *recognitio* and promulgation of the decrees of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, and proposed actions from the *Synthesis Report* which could be implemented immediately.

77. This report was written with deep gratitude for the generosity and participation of the many groups who contributed to the most recent consultation and to previous consultations, such as the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, various Diocesan Synods and the earlier Synod of Bishops consultations. The ongoing journey together, with Jesus Christ as its head, is a path to which the Catholic Church of Australia is committed.

## Appendices

To assist participation from groups and individuals, the NCPR and the working group developed a set of resources that is available on the Australian website for the Synod of Bishops: <https://www.catholic.org.au/synodalchurch>. The primary ones, contained in the following appendices, are:

- 1. Diocesan Roadmap:** This document provided guidance to dioceses on how to approach the current consultation phase.
- 2. Diocesan Reflection Guide:** This guide was intended for use by groups within the diocese who would reflect on and respond to the question: *How can we enhance the differentiated co-responsibility in the mission of all the members of the People of God?*
- 3. National Reflection Guide:** This guide was intended for use by national bodies within Australia who would reflect on and respond to the question: *How can the relations between Churches, between groupings of Churches at different levels and with the Bishop of Rome be creatively articulated in order to find “a dynamic balance between the dimension of the Church as a whole and its local roots”?*

In addition to these, the following resources were also made available on the website:

- A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report
- Towards October 2024: Guidelines from the General Secretariat of the Synod
- Links to the Official Synod of Bishops website
- Links to Australian media articles

Other resources were also shared with diocesan contacts through a Google Drive link:

- Resources and summary reports from prior stages of the Synod process
- Social media templates
- Intercessions and Reflections for the Lent/Easter period
- Videos and other resources to support synodality formation

## Appendix A: Diocesan Roadmap

SYNOD 2021 - 2024: FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION AND MISSION  
*2024 Diocesan Consultation*



# How can we be a synodal Church in mission?

## DIOCESAN ROADMAP *Towards the Second Assembly*

The tasks involved in carrying out the Consultation for the Second Assembly within each diocese will vary depending on local factors, but the general approach will involve the following steps:

### 1. Appointing the Diocesan Contact Person

Each diocese should select an individual to serve as the Diocesan Contact Person for this phase of the Synod. The Diocesan Contact Person will be responsible for:

- Liaising with the NCPR regarding the Synod consultation and other synodal activities;
- Coordinating and promoting the Synod consultation within their diocese;
- Receiving the responses from group reflections required as part of the consultation;
- Preparing the diocesan summary of group responses;
- Preparing the (optional) diocesan testimony;
- Forwarding the summary report and diocesan testimony to the NCPR by **Friday, 19 April 2024**.

The Diocesan Contact Person may need to work in collaboration with a small core team comprising representatives from parishes, movements, diocesan ministries, and religious communities to help organise the consultation and prepare the diocesan summary. Beyond the current Synod, the diocesan synodal team can continue to promote and implement the path of synodality in the diocese into the future in conjunction with the diocesan Bishop.

### 2. Planning the participatory process

Each diocese should aim for the widest participation possible, determining “what is possible in the time available and the best approach to take”. Pope Francis reminds us that, “the Synod is about synodality and not about this or that theme... The important thing is how the reflection is done, that is, in a synodal way.” Ideally, there would be opportunities for diverse groups to contribute to the consultation process.

Dioceses may wish to:

- Choose to approach the guiding questions from a particular perspective, reflecting on the relevant chapters of the [Synthesis Report](#) to which they can provide the most valuable input. It is acknowledged that it will not be possible to examine all the implications of the Report given the time frame.

- ▶ Focus on aspects that enable them to make contributions based on their own situation, character and experience, sharing good practices that represent visible and concrete signs of synodality.

### 3. Identifying groups for consultation

The guidelines provided by the General Secretariat of the Synod ask that consultation groups “involve people and groups that express a variety of experiences, skills, charisms, ministries within the People of God, and whose point of view is of particular help in focusing on the ‘how’”. Rather than setting up new groups, it is recommended that dioceses engage with existing structures. The Vicar-General or Chancellor in each diocese may be a valuable source for identifying appropriate groups to participate. It is suggested that such groups could include:

- ordained ministers (in particular parish priests), e.g. *Council of Priests, Council of Deacons*;
- other pastoral leaders (e.g. catechists and leaders of grassroots communities and small Christian communities, particularly in some regions; leaders of pastoral offices);
- consecrated men and women;
- leaders of Lay Associations, ecclesial Movements and new Communities;
- people who hold positions of responsibility in Church-related institutions and organisations (Diocesan councils, schools, universities, hospitals, reception centres, cultural centres, etc.);
- theologians and canonists.

Some examples of key stakeholder groups in Australian dioceses are The Diocesan Curia, The College of Consultors, The Council of Deans, CCD Advisory Committees, Chancery agencies (e.g. Justice offices, committees for religious, family and marriage offices, marriage tribunals), Diocesan Mission/Pastoral Councils, Clergy formation committees, CatholicCare and Catholic School councils and leaders, and ecumenical councils in the diocese.

### 4. Training group coordinators

The Diocesan Contact Person or synodal team will need to collaborate with group coordinators to assist them with their consultations. All coordinators will need to be instructed on the objectives of this stage and given access to relevant documents, resources and the Synod website. They can then design the best processes for their groups. Since the level of understanding and experience regarding synodality may differ across the diocese, formation may be provided to equip people with basic skills for synodal processes. What is most crucial is adopting suitable methods that promote attentive listening, genuine sharing, and communal spiritual discernment. Formation resources are available on the Synod website: <https://www.synod.va/en/resources/spiritual-and-liturgical-resources.html> or contact the NCPR.

On Friday, **16 February 2024**, the NCPR will hold an online workshop for diocesan contacts and group coordinators to answer questions and assist with facilitating group discussions. Details of the workshop will be sent to diocesan contacts in due course.

### 5. Implementing, monitoring, and guiding the consultation process

To increase awareness and encourage participation, wide publicity regarding the Synod consultations may be conducted to convey the Synod’s significance and objectives. The Diocesan Contact Person or team should maintain consistent communication with group coordinators of synodal consultation meetings across their dioceses during the months of February and March 2024. This will enable them to monitor progress, provide support where needed, and facilitate the exchange of ideas, best practices, and emerging feedback. The Reflection Guide sets out a proposed date of **Friday, 29 March 2024** for the submission of group responses to diocesan contacts. Dioceses may wish to amend this date to better suit their consultation process.

## 6. Preparing and submitting the Summary Report and diocesan Testimony

Finally, a **Summary Report** (maximum eight pages) should be prepared, synthesising the feedback received from group reflections across the diocese. This must be submitted to the NCPR via the online portal by **Friday, 19 April 2024**, at the very latest. To assist the NCPR in further analysis, dioceses are asked to include **5 to 7 key points** that capture the important aspects of the diocesan report. The Summary Report may also be communicated to the wider diocesan community and made publicly available.

In addition to the Summary, dioceses may wish to send a brief **Testimony** (maximum two pages) about the work done and their experiences of synodality, including any best practices that they consider significant for the growth of a missionary synodal dynamism. The Testimony is an optional report and can be included in the submission made via the online portal. The NCPR will submit the Testimony (in its entirety and without summary) to the General Secretariat by 15 May 2024.

## Important Documents

1. Consultation Document: Towards October 2024  
<https://bit.ly/TowardsOct2024>
2. Synthesis Report: A Synodal Church in Mission  
<https://bit.ly/FirstAssemblySynthesisReport>
3. ACBC Reflection Guide: Towards the Second Assembly (2024 Diocesan Consultation)  
<https://catholic.org.au/synodalchurch>
4. Resources on Spirituality and Synodal Discernment  
<https://www.synod.va/en/resources/spiritual-and-liturgical-resources.html>  
*OR please contact the NCPR for further assistance.*

## Important NCPR Contacts

### Trudy Dantis

National Coordinator, Synod 2021 – 2024  
Main contact for all matters Synod-related.  
[trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au](mailto:trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au)

### Stephen Reid

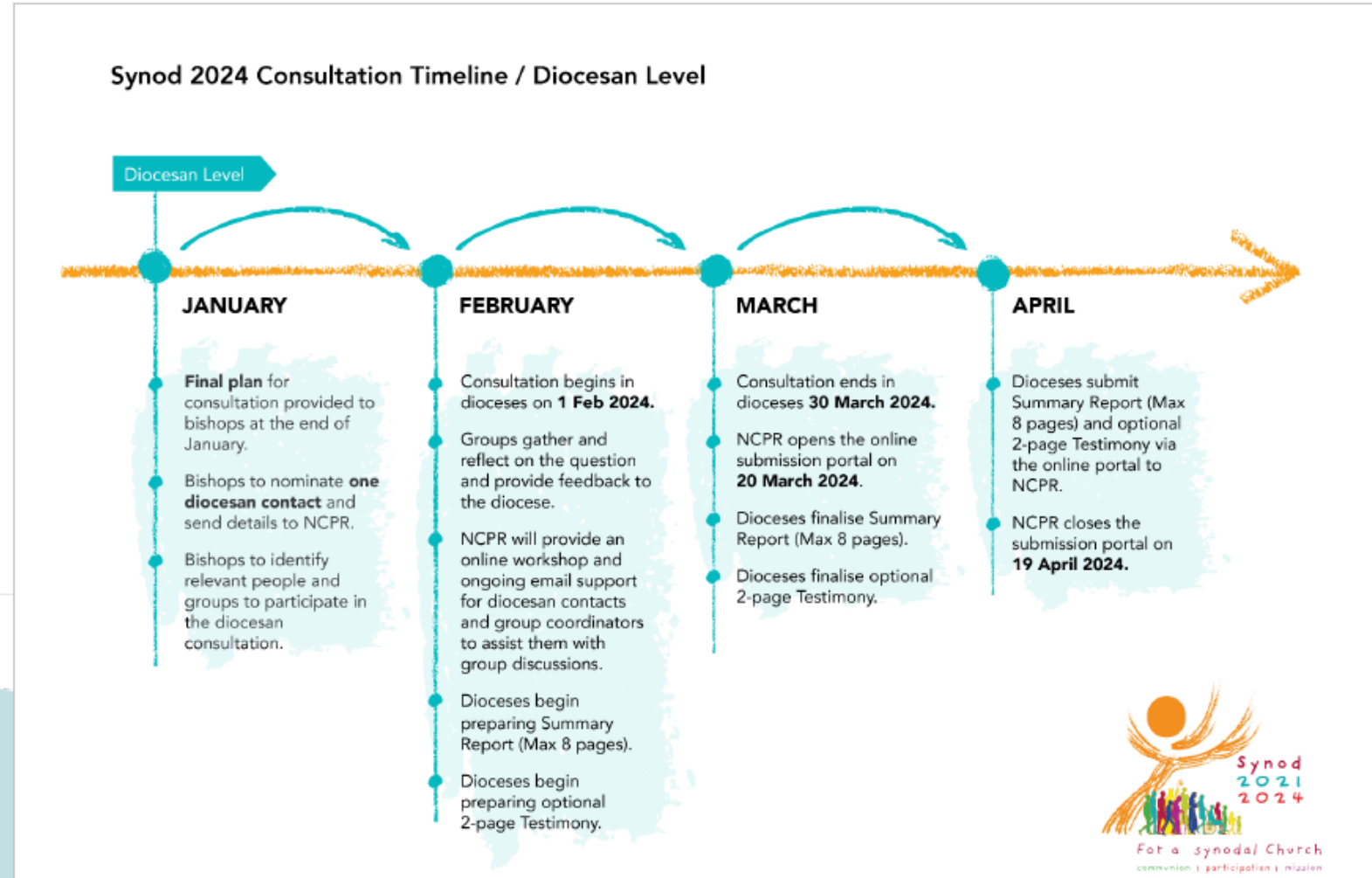
Senior Researcher  
Contact for online portal and data-related queries.  
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## Synod Consultation Timeline: Diocesan Level



## Appendix B: Diocesan Reflection Guide

SYNOD 2021 - 2024: FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION AND MISSION  
2024 Diocesan Consultation



# How can we be a synodal Church in mission?

## REFLECTION GUIDE *Towards the Second Assembly*

As the Church prepares for the Second Session of the Synodal Assembly in October 2024, local Churches are invited to contribute by deepening aspects of the Synthesis Report that are fundamental to the Synod's theme. These contributions are guided by the question: *How can we be a synodal Church in mission?*

The objective of these new reflections is to identify the paths we can follow and the tools we might adopt in our different contexts and circumstances in order to enhance the unique contribution of each baptised person and of each Church in the one mission of proclaiming the Risen Lord and his Gospel to the world today.

### Preparing for the group reflection session

**For Group leaders:** Prior to your meeting with other members of your group, it is recommended that you read through this Reflection Guide and become familiar with the steps of this document. Note that this Guide is intended for groups of 7-10 people. Larger or smaller groups may need to make adjustments to allow everyone to participate fully.

Groups are encouraged to determine the best approach to take in the time possible. "Realistically, it will not be possible to examine all the implications. Therefore, each [group] is invited to focus on those aspects that enable it to make a contribution in light of its own situation, character and experience, sharing good practices that represent visible and concrete signs of synodality." (General Secretariat, *Towards October 2024*, 3) As Group leader, you may choose to discern which sections/chapters of the Synthesis Report your group will focus on.

#### For Group members:

- Take time to pray, perhaps using the Synod prayer in Step 1 of this guide.
- Read the sections/chapters of the [Synthesis Report](#) that your group will focus on. (Note that Chapters 8-12, 16 and 18 are relevant to the reflection questions.)
- After your first reading, take time to reflect and observe your response.
- Read the sections/chapters a second time and note what in the text spoke to you.
- Prepare to discuss your reflections with the group.

PRAY TOGETHER

READ QUESTIONS  
AND REFLECT

SHARE AND  
LISTEN

PRAY AND  
RESPOND

**STEP  
01**

**PRAY TOGETHER**

At the beginning of the group reflection, you are invited to pray together.

The following Scripture passage, which opens the Synthesis Report, is from 1 Cor 12:13 (NRSV):

*For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body.*

Take time to meditate on this or a similar verse, and on what God is sharing about the synodal journey through it. Some alternative Scripture readings are:

*How very good and pleasant it is  
when kindred live together in unity! (Psalm 133:1, NRSV)*

*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.'*  
(Matt 5:14-15, NRSV)

When you pray, you can use the words written below or just speak to God from your heart.

**Prayer for the Synod: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus***

**We stand before You, Holy Spirit,  
as we gather together in Your name.**

**With You alone to guide us,  
make Yourself at home in our hearts;  
Teach us the way we must go  
and how we are to pursue it.**

**We are weak and sinful;  
do not let us promote disorder.  
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path  
nor partiality influence our actions.**

**Let us find in You our unity  
so that we may journey together to eternal life  
and not stray from the way of truth  
and what is right.**

**All this we ask of You,  
who are at work in every place and time,  
in the communion of the Father and the Son,  
forever and ever.**

**Amen.**

## STEP 02

## READ AND REFLECT

Read and reflect on the following questions in silence. Reflect on your experience of faith, life and the Church related to these questions.

### How can we enhance the differentiated co-responsibility in the mission of all the members of the People of God?

1. What ways of relating, structures, processes of discernment and decision-making with regard to mission make it possible to recognise, shape, and promote co-responsibility?
2. What ministries and participatory bodies can be renewed or introduced to better express this co-responsibility?

Write a list of all the responses to these questions that come to mind.

### Synthesis Report

The following chapters from the [Synthesis Report](#) are relevant to the reflection questions above. Your group leader might discern before the reflection session which sections/chapters are most relevant for your discussion.

Chapter 8 – Church is Mission

Chapter 9 – Women in the Life and Mission of the Church

Chapter 10 – Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements: A Charismatic Sign

Chapter 11 – Deacons and Priests in a Synodal Church

Chapter 12 – The Bishop in Ecclesial Communion

Chapter 16 – Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church

Chapter 18 – Structures for Participation

Your responses to the questions may relate to one chapter or be more general in nature.

**STEP  
03****SHARE AND LISTEN****Round 1: Sharing My Reflection**

- The facilitator poses each question and invites the group to respond. Speakers may work clockwise, or the facilitator may nominate someone to begin, and other participants follow.
- Everyone speaks for one or two minutes, sharing their reflection responses and adding to what was previously shared.
- When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart. The focus is on listening to others rather than simply thinking about what you want to say.
- At the end of each question, the group pauses for a moment of silence. This may help absorb what was said, take a breather, and return to the next question.
- As participants are sharing, the facilitator takes brief notes of what has been discussed.

**Round 2: Reflecting On The Sharing**

- After the first sharing, this round is an opportunity to begin to prepare the group response.
- Here, the group is invited to answer questions like:
  - *What consoled me or struck me as I listened to my companions?*
  - *What did I hear? What did I feel? What was the Spirit saying to me/us?*
  - *Was I especially touched by a particular sharing?*
- Everyone speaks for one or two minutes. You may begin with the phrase, *“In the group I heard...and it left me feeling...”*.
- The facilitator makes notes of key points emerging from the group’s reflection.
- At the end of this sharing, the group pauses for a period of silence.

**Round 3: Finalising the Group Response**

- In this round, participants are not obliged to speak and can speak spontaneously.
- In preparing your group response, you may reflect on questions like:
  - *Thinking about what was shared, what should be included in our group’s response?*
  - *Is there a common thread? Is there something missing?*
  - *Have we received any particular insight or revelation? What is it?*
  - *Where did we experience a sense of harmony with others as we shared with one another?*
  - *What are the feelings of the group? Is there consensus or disagreement?*
- After everyone has finished speaking, the facilitator reconfirms the key points with the group and prepares a summarised version of the discussion.

## STEP 04

## PRAY AND RESPOND

At the end of the reflection time, you are invited to pray together. You can use the words below, or you might like to say a prayer of gratitude in your own words.

*Creator God, we thank you for the encounter with one another today.*

*We know that where two or three are gathered, you are in our midst.*

*Thank you for being with us and for the courage to speak boldly and with passion, and the humility to listen with open hearts.*

*We ask you to continue to walk with us, as we discover the pathway toward the future you are calling us to.*

*Amen.*

### Submit Your Response To Your Diocesan Coordinator

- It is recommended that the group's response be captured in a short summary. You may find it helpful to compose this in a separate document.
- You are asked to include **5 to 7 key points** that capture the important parts of the discussion.
- Your response 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 emerged from their reflection rather than a series of generalised or doctrinally correct statements.
- Views should not be excluded simply because they were expressed by a small minority of participants.
- Overall, the response should capture what the Holy Spirit has inspired the group to discern.

#### **Your group's response will become your submission to your Diocese Contact Person.**

A list of Diocese Contact Persons can be found at <https://catholic.org.au/synodalchurch>. If you have any problems, please contact the NCPR team at [ncpr@catholic.org.au](mailto:ncpr@catholic.org.au).

All responses must be submitted to your Diocese Contact Person by **Friday, 29 March 2024** (or on the alternative date determined by your diocese).



Thank you for contributing to the discernment process of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

*"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues... But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way."*

*(1 Cor 12:27-28,31)*



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## Appendix C: National Reflection Guide

SYNOD 2021 - 2024: FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION AND MISSION  
2024 National Consultation



# How can we be a synodal Church in mission?

## REFLECTION GUIDE *Towards the Second Assembly*

As the Church prepares for the Second Session of the Synodal Assembly in October 2024, local Churches are invited to contribute by deepening aspects of the Synthesis Report that are fundamental to the Synod's theme. These contributions are guided by the question: *How can we be a synodal Church in mission?*

The objective of these new reflections is to identify the paths we can follow and the tools we might adopt in our different contexts and circumstances in order to enhance the unique contribution of each baptised person and of each Church in the one mission of proclaiming the Risen Lord and his Gospel to the world today.

### Preparing for the group reflection session

**For Group leaders:** Prior to your meeting with other members of your group, it is recommended that you read through this Reflection Guide and become familiar with the steps of this document. Note that this Guide is intended for groups of 7-10 people. Larger or smaller groups may need to make adjustments to allow everyone to participate fully.

Groups are encouraged to determine the best approach to take in the time possible. "Realistically, it will not be possible to examine all the implications. Therefore, each [group] is invited to focus on those aspects that enable it to make a contribution in light of its own situation, character and experience, sharing good practices that represent visible and concrete signs of synodality." (General Secretariat, *Towards October 2024*, 3) As Group leader, you may choose to discern which sections/chapters of the Synthesis Report your group will focus on.

#### For Group members:

- Take time to pray, perhaps using the Synod prayer in Step 1 of this guide.
- Read the sections/chapters of the [Synthesis Report](#) that your group will focus on.
- (Note that Chapters 13, 19 and 20 are relevant to the reflection questions.)
- After your first reading, take time to reflect and observe your response.
- Read the sections/chapters a second time and note what in the text spoke to you.
- Prepare yourself to discuss your reflections with the group.

PRAY TOGETHER

READ QUESTIONS  
AND REFLECT

SHARE AND  
LISTEN

PRAY AND  
RESPOND



**STEP  
01**

**PRAY TOGETHER**

At the beginning of the group reflection, you are invited to pray together.

The following Scripture passage, which opens the Synthesis Report, is from 1 Cor 12:13 (NRSV):

*For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body.*

Take time to meditate on this or a similar verse, and on what God is sharing about the synodal journey through it. Some alternative Scripture readings are:

*How very good and pleasant it is  
when kindred live together in unity! (Psalm 133:1, NRSV)*

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Eph 4:4-6, NRSV)*

When you pray, you can use the words written below or just speak to God from your heart.

**Prayer for the Synod: Adsumus Sancte Spiritus**

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,  
as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us,  
make Yourself at home in our hearts;  
Teach us the way we must go  
and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;  
do not let us promote disorder.  
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path  
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity  
so that we may journey together to eternal life  
and not stray from the way of truth  
and what is right.

All this we ask of You,  
who are at work in every place and time,  
in the communion of the Father and the Son,  
forever and ever.  
Amen.

**STEP  
02**

**READ AND REFLECT**

Read and reflect on the following question in silence. Reflect on your experience of faith, life and the Church related to this question.

**How can the relations between Churches, between groupings of Churches at different levels and with the Bishop of Rome be creatively articulated in order to find “a dynamic balance between the dimension of the Church as a whole and its local roots” (Synthesis Report 5.g)?**

Write a list of all the responses to this question that come to mind.

### **Synthesis Report**

The following chapters from the [Synthesis Report](#) are relevant to the reflection question above. Your group leader might discern before the reflection session which sections/chapters are most relevant for your discussion.

Chapter 13 – The Bishop of Rome in the College of Bishops

Chapter 19 – Groupings of Churches within the Communion of the Whole Church

Chapter 20 – The Synod of Bishops and Ecclesial Assemblies

Your responses to the question may relate to one chapter or be more general in nature.

## STEP 03

## SHARE AND LISTEN

### Round 1: Sharing My Reflection

- The facilitator poses each question and invites the group to respond. Speakers may work clockwise, or the facilitator may nominate someone to begin, and other participants follow.
- Everyone speaks for one or two minutes, sharing their reflection responses and adding to what was previously shared.
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*We ask you to continue to walk with us, as we discover the pathway toward the future you are calling us to.*

*Amen.*

### Submit Your Response to the NCPR

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- Views should not be excluded simply because they were expressed by a small minority of participants.
- Overall, the response should capture what the Holy Spirit has inspired the group to discern.

#### **Your group's response will become your submission to the NCPR.**

- Submit your response via email to the NCPR at [trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au](mailto:trudy.dantis@catholic.org.au), copying in Stephen Reid, [stephen.reid@catholic.org.au](mailto:stephen.reid@catholic.org.au) and Leith Dudfield, [leith.dudfield@catholic.org.au](mailto:leith.dudfield@catholic.org.au).
- If you have any problems, please contact the NCPR team at the email addresses above.

All responses must be submitted by **Friday, 19 April 2024**.



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Synod  
2021  
2024

For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission

