

SYNOD OF BISHOPS

Diocesan Synthesis

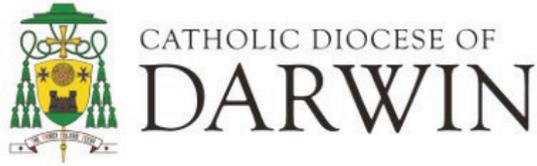


CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
DARWIN



Synod
2021
2023

For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission



Synthesis for the Synod of Bishops, Diocese of Darwin

“Jesus said: Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your servant. In the same way, the Son of Man did not come to be served, but rather to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many”

(Matt 20:26-28)

This Synod poses the following fundamental question: A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.” How is this “journeying together” happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”? (PD, 26)

With a listening heart to the voices of the people of the Darwin Diocese, we submit the following synthesis to the Synod of Bishops.

Our Diocese

The context of the Diocese of Darwin influences the conversations and discernment that impact the synthesis provided in this report. The Northern Territory population is currently 224,600 with a Catholic population recorded as 45,150. The extensive area of the Diocese spans 1,4000,000 sq. km, with fifteen parishes, of which five are situated in Aboriginal communities. In addition, the Diocese has eighteen schools and colleges with Catholic Education Northern Territory employing one thousand, three hundred and thirty three (1,333) staff across the diocese. Southern Cross Care conducts a residential home for elders in the community. Catholic Care Northern Territory employs more than two hundred and thirty (230) staff across the Diocese, reaching out into almost all towns and communities. The Diocese is served by four (one on loan) diocesan priests and twenty-two priests belonging to Religious Congregations. The Diocese has one candidate preparing for ordination, one full time married Deacon and six men preparing for Married Diaconate. There are eleven women Religious Congregations represented in the Diocese. St Vincent de Paul Society has a strong presence and outreach in the Diocese. Chaplaincy to the three prisons in the Northern Territory serves the needs of more than one thousand (1000) inmates, 80% of whom are Aboriginal.

Our Listening

The process toward synodality began in July 2018 with the Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue opportunity provided at the annual gathering of leaders across the Diocese. Following that, the Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue sessions were held in parishes, and some hosted by the Diocese.

In November 2021 a Diocesan working party was established to seek a further listening and dialogue process towards the Synod of Bishops. Parishioners across the Diocese were invited during the Christmas and New Year season to begin the year with coffee conversations based on the synodal themes of Communion, Participation and Mission. A Diocesan Christmas card was distributed with an invitation to participate locally and nationally.

The voices of Fifty-nine (59) people were welcomed from individuals and as voices within group submissions from across the Diocese. The majority of respondents were in the age range of between thirty and sixty-five years (30-65yrs). Most submissions were received from the parish communities and those serving in lay ministries.

The submissions represented a broad range of theological and spiritual perspectives and voices, including from the Neocatechumenal community. It needs to be noted that the process was not able to represent the voices of Aboriginal Catholic Communities at this time as the Aboriginal Diocesan Pastoral Council that meets on an annual basis has twice been cancelled due to Covid 19. It also needs to be acknowledged that both the process and time implications prevented the participation and voice of Catholics who are no longer active participants in weekly Eucharistic celebrations. Whilst as a Diocese, we are actively represented on the Council of Churches, it is noted that we did not have the opportunity to hear from members of other Churches as part of the listening and dialogue process.

The working party recognises the synodal process was undertaken over a very short time frame, including the summer holiday period and in the early months of the year marked by Covid 19 disrupting family and work routines. The working party acknowledges the fatigue that may be present amongst parishioners with the synodal process following the extensive preparation for the Plenary Council. Hence, this report reflects and honours the voices of the fifty-nine (59) participants who made submissions to the synodal process in addition to responses recorded in a number of dialogue sessions that have taken place over the period of time from 2018-2022.

Darwin Diocese Synod of Bishops Working Group Members

Bishop Charles Gauci

Bishop Emeritus Eugene Hurley

Fr Malcolm Fyfe MSC

Fr Prakash Menezes SVD

Fr Leo Wearden MSC

Sr Catherine Mead RSJ

Kathryn Pettersen

Shaun De Zylva

Clalia Mar

IN COMMUNION

Participants were invited to respond to the question: *How can we better journey together in listening, speaking out and celebrating?*

Common to all the responses was the central place of *listening to the Word of God*, expressed in a way of life *grounded in the practice of the Eucharist*. Respondents affirmed that the Word of God is heard in Scripture, in creation, and in each other.

'What I have found helpful to "journey together" is to be part of a Neocatechumenal community that allows a group of people (a community) to journey together through a structured itinerary of faith.'

Hence, a *theology of accompaniment* was considered necessary for the journey in faith, supported by the example of the early Church, and the faithful participation of members in parish communities.

Some responses highlighted that *living gospel values in daily life* is very important, in actively living out the Word of God. The voices affirmed that accompaniment was present in communities of specific and cultural groupings within the diocese. These groups such as the Neo-Catechumenal movement and parish groups in Central Australia highlight our *shared baptism* as being the focus of our accompaniment of each other.

'In parishes (such as ours) where there is great ethnic and cultural diversity, as well as many other types of diversity, I believe that it would be a powerful witness if greater effort, at every level, were directed towards highlighting our common Baptism, those things that unite us, and those Gospel and Church imperatives which call every culture to conversion and growth and greater maturity.'

While participants identified the challenges of journeying together in light of theological differences or expressions of spirituality in varying cultures, particular reference was made to ways in which the journey could be enriched by having greater availability and accessibility to the topics and discussions held in the Conference of Bishops. This

indicated a desire for *greater participation and understanding in enacting faith in daily life*.

While this synodal process did not enable time to engage with Aboriginal people's hopes, there were non-indigenous voices that called for *listening to Aboriginal stories and spirituality* to influence our living of faith in Australia. Responses from participants encouraged active listening to our first nations people and their rich and deep spirituality, which is not exclusive to Christianity. It was recognised that *trust needs to be built* to enable an understanding and interpretation of scripture and the *Word of God from an Aboriginal perspective*. Voices affirmed that engaging with art and tradition will enable us to better understand *healing and cleansing* as we journey together.

Participants reflected their deep empathy and compassion for those who have suffered as a result of abuse and recognised the necessity of responding in compassion and empathy. There was a strong recommendation for the Church to *respond proactively to the hurt and pain* that has been endured by many of its members. Numerous voices expressed the need for ongoing listening and dialogue that must continue in our journey together:

'The Church, having reflected on its failings in historical institutional child sexual abuse, must now commit to not only listen to survivors but also to be more adept and more proactive in identifying and helping victims of insidious abuses which are still rampant amongst people within and without the church.'

In listening to the signs of the times and engaging with the issues confronting our society today, questions were raised as to how as a Church we could attend and respond to social issues such as *climate change*, the lack of *social inclusion* and responses to *intergenerational trauma* experienced by many in Aboriginal communities.

IN COMMUNION

We hear the call to:

- Listen in the wake of the sexual abuse crisis to be more adept and more proactive in identifying and assisting victims of abuse. It is recognised that formation is required for our clergy and church personnel in developing skills to respond to the ongoing hurt that is among many of God's people.
- Encourage greater unity in understanding that cultural diversity and the various spiritualities and cultural Catholic practices are an opportunity for transformation and conversion.
- Create intentional processes and structures that support ongoing discernment to enable all the baptised to be heard and respected.
- Accompany one another on the journey of personal and communal awakening that is inspired by compassion and love.
- Respond to the desire for participation in creating opportunities to journey together in ways that inform and form the integration of life and faith.
- Advocate for greater openness to others and a deeper exploration of the meaning of the Gospel in the reality of life.
- Grow in mercy and compassion in responding to the hurt and pain experienced by those who feel ostracised by society and Church. The circumstances of divorce and relationship breakdown and intergenerational trauma were examples given of this hurt and pain.
- Value rituals such as the Third Rite of Reconciliation as a means of giving consolation and hope to many in our faith communities.

OUR PARTICIPATION

Participants were invited to respond to the question: *How can we better participate in the life of the Church?*

Participants affirmed that in many parishes the goals for our local church community are created by the *collaboration of the people of God* and are based on inspiration from the Holy Spirit and the teaching of Jesus Christ.

The capacity to *participate in small groups* in parishes and Catholic school communities such as on advisory boards, in liturgy groups, and social outreach were considered of utmost importance. *Structures* such as parish councils are effective when members provide advice with a variety of skills amongst parishioners. The parish council is seen as a place where skills and gifts can be shared and contributed to the life of the Parish when participation is encouraged. Often goals are set with the influence of the Parish Priest, indicating that *Co-responsibility* was required for effective participation.

A number of voices in the group affirmed that the synodal process in itself embodies participation and was considered to empower members of the community to be *valued and heard as part of decision making*. The *inclusion of all voices* was highly valued and considered essential for the parish as a whole.

'These group discernment meetings embody PARTICIPATION in themselves. By simply being at such meetings, everyone is heard, valued, and is part of decision-making; and everyone's voice is important to the group as a whole. The Holy Spirit 'explodes' within us.'

The role of the *priest as the listener* is key in working with parishioners in evaluating directions and actions for the parish community. Equally, participants highlighted that group discernment and personal reflection enable members to share in and participate in a meaningful way.

The listening and dialogue sessions viewed the importance of relationships and structures as being critical to enabling expressions of the faith community, particularly when giving rise to new things that God is doing in and amongst God's people. Critical to the relationships and structures is

the *spirit of cooperation, welcome, and collaboration* that is considered essential for full participation of God's people in the life of the Church. One group considered creating projects to include and connect people through outreach allowing an expression of mission in the local community.

There was a call to consider the various roles that enable both men and women to meaningfully participate in and contribute to the decision-making processes in the community. A *balance of gender in authority, and responsibility* was identified as being critical to ensure that diversity was honoured.

Underpinning participation is the necessity for Adult *faith formation* to encourage a deep and meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ to enable mission to be enacted. The Diocese currently supports adult faith formation through avenues such as Nungalinga College for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian leaders. In addition, various Parishes offer opportunities for formation through retreats and small group gatherings. While voices spoke to varying opportunities for faith formation, it is evident that a common understanding of faith formation is required to meet the needs of diverse communities. Some voices sought affirmation for a catechetical program while others named the need for deeper formation in theological knowledge and spirituality.'

Co-responsibility rather than indifference was highlighted as being critical in this process of shared authority and responsibility. The diversity of perspectives, to enable an inclusive community, was named as being essential, particularly in hearing the voices of Aboriginal people.

'We need to seek a balance of responsibility and authority among all the diverse people in our community, including Indigenous/non-Indigenous. Responsibility is for each and every one of us in some way. It is not all the Church hierarchy's responsibility. We are called to be co-responsible, rather than indifferent. We all need to feel "this is my role too, not just someone

else's role". Our Parish Pastoral Council should include representatives from the gay community, people with disabilities, people who are divorced.'

Using **inclusive language** more often than not was deemed as a requirement to enable full participation, particularly of women in liturgical celebrations and in dialogue.

'The language in the version of the Jerusalem Bible used in Mass is very non-inclusive for women. Using more inclusive language would help a lot; would help women feel they are recognised as being present and are being addressed by the Word of God.'

Further, the voices of women raised issues of access to leadership roles as an expression of their dignity and human rights:

'We have great priests, bishops, and they are inspiring for their commitment to God. Deacons can only be men. Why couldn't women be

deacons? In the public sector, for example, there are many women in leadership roles and they, by and large, are very good leaders. We need balance - not all men, but not all women either. We need a mixture and a balance.'

Extending invitations and the call to participate was regarded as a critical aspect of expanding participation within parish communities. When the laity believes that they are truly equal and valued by the clergy, then the spirit is able to influence how parishioners are able to work together.

It was considered that much of the administration of parish communities can be **shared** with skilled members of the Parish to support the work of the parish and to enable priests to attend to the ministry entrusted to them in their role.

Overall, the responses recognised that the **messiness of life in which the journey of faith** is lived, calls for compassion and listening to support one another on the journey.

OUR PARTICIPATION

We hear the call to:

- Create ongoing and intentional formation opportunities in Leading for Mission for emerging leaders, those in ministries within our Diocese including those in priestly life and ministry.
- Deepen formation experiences grounded in the Scriptures to enrich participation. Some ways this can happen is through small group accompaniment in parishes or those similar to the Neocatechumenal way.
- Provide ongoing support for programs such as those conducted at Nungalinya College.
- Create opportunities for strategic shared responsibility at both the parish and diocesan levels.
- Establish structures and processes such as a Diocesan Pastoral Council that will assist in discerning new ways of being Church in the Diocese of Darwin.
- Claim the responsibility to respond to shared participation, discernment, and decision-making in a spirit of collaboration.
- Seek out the voices of those excluded from mainstream participation in society and our parish communities, such as women, LGBTQIA+, Aboriginal people, migrants, and refugees.

OUR COMMON MISSION

Participants were invited to respond to the question: *How can we better journey together in a shared Mission?*

The context of the Diocese of Darwin is influenced and *grounded in Aboriginal culture and spirituality*, expressed in the fabric of life in communities in the Northern Territory. The recent *Uluru Statement from the Heart* provides a strong basis for ongoing discernment and direction from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Further, the arrival of *migrants and refugees* settling into the Northern Territory has contributed to diverse parish communities. The contribution of culture and spiritualities from Timor Leste, Indonesia, Africa, India, Papua New Guinea, and the Pacific *enrich the liturgical celebrations* within the Diocese. Moreover, the contribution of such diverse cultural groups in walking together in a shared mission is rich in reality and potential.

A theme emerging from the submissions was the need for Communion and Participation with a *balance of responsibility and authority* for mission, so all voices, spiritualities and cultural practices are valued and able to contribute. One voice clearly expressed the challenge and opportunity this presents:

'Aboriginal culture has a lot to contribute to our contemporary world; it is a culture very close to the spirit world. It is hard for us in the 'dominant culture' to hear/perceive this.'

A challenge identified through the discernment process was to find ways of enhancing the cultural richness of the many groups in the Diocese. It was suggested that finding ways of seeking out connections with other groups is essential. One group

identified that tension exists when only identifying with and prioritising specific cultural expressions of faith practice. Rather a preference was expressed to seek our *shared baptism* as the basis for what will unite us as a community.

It is evident that while there are differing theologies and approaches to Mission within the responses received, there was affirmation that the *Church is seen as an instrument for mission* with a variety of ministries. The tapestry of ministries in the Diocese of Darwin such as Catholic education, Catholic Care - social services, charitable outreach, youth ministry, chaplaincy in prisons, health care, defence, health, and aged care provides opportunities for collaboration and a focused approach. In addition, it is recognised that Mission is also enhanced by those who undertake ministries within liturgical worship. It is regarded as critical for ongoing dialogue of ministries within the Diocese of Darwin to *enable collaboration and intentional decisions and actions in promoting a common approach to Mission*.

The theme of Ecumenism gave rise to many of the interactions and collaborations that take place within the diocese, through liturgical celebrations and social justice actions in furthering a common mission. Some examples of this include the Ecumenical blessings of palms and prayer on Palm Sunday with the Anglican and Uniting Churches, Palm Sunday Welcome Refugee Rally and Humpty Doo Stations of the Cross and procession. The vastness of the Diocese of Darwin lends itself to exploring further *collaborative approaches to a common mission*.

OUR COMMON MISSION

We hear the call to:

- Claim the opportunity for Catholic organisations in the Diocese to work together with Parishes to understand Mission in practice and that we value each contribution.
- Enact the Synod and Plenary Council process to see a renewal of commitment to Catholic Social Teaching in parishes and a new appreciation for the works of the Diocese in the Northern Territory.
- To be in dialogue with each other and also with the broader community, including Government for intentional action in advocating and being a voice for the common good.
- Welcome and endorse the Uluru Statement from the Heart and commit to growing partnerships, mutual learning and collaboration to incorporate cultural knowledge and wisdom from Aboriginal people in our local diocese and in the wisdom from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC).
- Seek further enculturation of Aboriginal spirituality in liturgy and worship.
- Acknowledge and celebrate the richness that cultural groups bring to the expression of Mission in the Diocese of Darwin.
- Explore further collaboration in Ecumenism for shared mission in the Northern Territory.

“Jesus said: Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your servant. In the same way, the Son of Man did not come to be served, but rather to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

(Matt 20:26-28)

In listening to the Spirit expressed in the voices across the Diocese, it is evident that there is much that can be affirmed in our journeying together in faith. The presence of Jesus Christ is evident in many people committing themselves to living the gospel in the ordinary circumstances of their lives. The reality of the social, cultural and economic milieu within the Northern Territory presents significant challenges and opportunities for the Diocese of Darwin, its local parishes and its agencies, to journey together in a spirit of collaboration and participation.

As a Diocese we commit to the ongoing journey of synodality that the Holy Spirit is inviting us to at this time, recognising that the journey is slow and requires patience and compassion.

We make a commitment to specific actions arising from the synodal process:

1. To intentionally develop further the synodal discernment process in creating an understanding of ***Co-responsibility in Mission*** amongst the leaders in our parish, Catholic schools, Catholic Care and Social Service agencies, and chaplaincy:
 - To build a collaborative culture through discernment and a common understanding and strategic approach to Mission within the Diocese.
 - To empower leaders, including clergy, with formation, information, knowledge, and skills in responding to the hurt, alienation and intergenerational trauma encountered on a daily basis.
2. Through a synodal process to examine ***structures and practices*** that enable expressions of our shared baptism, marked by inclusivity and participation:
 - By developing a Diocesan Pastoral Council to discern strategies and priorities in enriching the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in and through the variety of cultural faith practices.
 - Empowering leaders at the local and diocesan levels to claim their responsibility and right for full participation in discernment for decision making.
 - To provide intentional, ongoing formation opportunities in spirituality, theology and leadership and in contemporary Church teaching.
3. To Respectfully and authentically learn from and listen to the voices of Aboriginal people in the ***journey of Reconciliation:***
 - By deepening an understanding of the Uluru Statement from the Heart.
 - Walking with Aboriginal leaders and families in their quest for justice and healing through culturally responsive education, health, economic and social participation.
 - Walking with and learning from elders in seeking further enculturation of Aboriginal spirituality in liturgy and worship.

This summary of the synodal process is made with the awareness that there are many groups and individuals on the journey in furthering the proclamation of the Gospel in and through their participation. The ongoing commitment to listen more deeply to the Spirit living among us leads us to recognise and acknowledge the potential for further collaboration and shared responsibility in enhancing the Mission of God in the Diocese of Darwin.



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