

XVI
ORDINARY GENERAL
ASSEMBLY
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

DIOCESAN SYNTHESIS
FROM THE
DIOCESE OF BROKEN BAY



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THE JOURNEY

The Synodal journey towards the XVI General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (Synod of Bishops) has commenced at an auspicious time in the life of the Diocese of Broken Bay. At the time of the announcement of the Synod, the Diocese of Broken Bay had already started two other synodal processes: the Pastoral Mission development project (PM), and the Pastoral Discernment - Central Coast (PDCC), described in further detail below. Further, the Diocese regarded the announcement of the 2023 Synod of Bishops an opportunity to continue that journey started in 2017 in the lead-up to the Fifth Plenary Council of the Church in Australia. The Diocese of Broken Bay had one of the highest response rates for the Plenary Council.

At the announcement of the Synod of Bishops, the decision was made to integrate the feedback process to the Synod with the PM and PDCC. It was viewed that these three processes aligned as a movement of the Holy Spirit. The Synod of Bishops was an international process; the PM was diocesan-wide; and the PDCC focused on a particular region within the Diocese. We worked to align the questions and themes in the PM and PDCC with those for the Synod of Bishops. These processes were underpinned by a notion of listening, guided by the Holy Spirit in the hope of seeing God's knowledge and wisdom emerge. In order to reduce survey fatigue and to maximise responses, answers were shared across the three processes. In effect, those who participated in the PM or PDCC automatically had their responses considered for the Synod of Bishops, and vice versa.

In addition to this, a large parish within the Diocese has also started its own synodal process in order to discern how it can better live its missionary call and serve those within its region. It is entitled "Being Church in the City: our Journey Together" and draws from the resources of the 2023 Synod of Bishops. Whilst this local synodal journey is not considered in this report as it has only recently been launched, it demonstrates the Holy Spirit is moving our Diocese into a culture of synodality.

A key positive reflected in our Synodal journey included the hope among many of the respondents that these processes might help us to move forward as a Diocese. Some respondents expressed appreciation at having their voices heard, and many of the responses were quite extensive and passionate.

At the same time, there were some clear difficulties experienced, two of which surfaced regularly in each of the processes. Firstly, many people reported experiencing

"survey fatigue," due to the number of times their input had been sought in a relatively short period of time. A common sentiment was that so much feedback was being given for very little action and output. This leads in to a second commonly reported difficulty: a loss of faith in the synodal process due to a perceived lack of action. This feedback is largely reflective of expectations and disappointments around the Fifth Plenary Council of the Church in Australia.

The following paragraphs highlight unique aspects of each of the three recent synodal journeys.

Synod of Bishops 2023

After announcing the Synodal journey towards the Synod of Bishops, our Diocese recommended that the people of faith participate by responding to the online questionnaire through the ACBC, which was open from October 2021 until March 2022.

The Diocese had links to the questionnaire regularly through its social media accounts, diocesan website, E-newsletters and other email communications, parish letters and bulletin notices. A small number of responses were also received directly via email. A Diocesan taskforce was formed including representatives from various regions, groups and backgrounds in the Diocese. The taskforce was asked to discern and synthesise the Diocesan response to the Synod of Bishops.

Some concerns raised that were unique to this process were that there didn't seem to be a great enough emphasis from the Diocese on the Synod of Bishops journey, and that the restrictive word limit for the national online questionnaire was not conducive to synodality.

Diocesan Pastoral Mission

The PM journey was a diocesan synodal discernment process that centred on how we as a diocese can better evangelise. This process was undertaken to help the Diocesan Evangelisation team set relevant goals, objectives, and initiatives over the coming years to better support evangelisation in parishes and faith communities of the Diocese.

The synodal process forming the development of the diocesan Pastoral Mission started in 2021 when the Evangelisation team spoke with the clergy of the Diocese, getting their verbal feedback on evangelisation and asking them to complete a survey. From there the evangelisation team connected with relevant contacts (e.g. youth ministers, PPC members, school REC's etc.) and asked for feedback via specific questions tailored to their particular evangelisation teams. Finally, an online questionnaire was made available to the whole Diocese in February 2022

until April 2022. The six questions in this questionnaire were related to the evangelisation goals and were taken directly from the ten themes mentioned in the Synod Vademecum document, highlighting the close connection to the Synod process.

Pastoral Discernment Central Coast (PDCC)

The PDCC synodal journey focused on a particular region in the Diocese of Broken Bay, the Central Coast. The aim of this process was to identify the pastoral needs of the region using a process of consultation through all contexts of Catholic life; parish, school, CatholicCare etc.

A significant milestone in the PDCC project was the invitation for community leaders to nominate a facilitator to lead the consultation processes with each of the communities. It gave the community leaders ownership of the processes and facilitated communication with their parishes, schools, and CatholicCare service areas.

The community expressed concern with the short time-frame for responses during the initial conversation. Extending the dates made many representatives feel like their voices and concerns were heard and listened to. The process and structures allowed for fruitful conversations rather than simply a “tick-a-box” survey response with a wide variety of participants. Other positive feedback came from the listening phase where people felt hearing others and having themselves heard was a genuine movement of the Holy Spirit.

Parent engagement was identified as a difficulty by some school teams who have found that, whether it be this process or curriculum-related engagement, it is difficult to engage parents in general.

The three synodal journeys received responses from both individuals and groups. There were approximately 46 responses from groups and 60 responses from individuals. Altogether, the responses represented approx. 2800 people from the Diocese. It is important to note that as the PDCC focused on the Diocese’ Central Coast region, some report answers may disproportionately reflect this region over others. In the body of this report, along with the three synodal journeys described, we will take into account diocesan responses from the Fifth Plenary Council of the Church in Australia and the 2018 Synod on Youth journeys.

Plenary Council

The Australian Bishops called for a Plenary Council to be held in 2020 with the theme:

“Listen to what the Spirit is Saying.”

This journey started in 2017 and the Diocese of Broken Bay engaged the process through the appointment of a diocesan coordinator. From there, local animators

were also selected to coordinate the engagement for their local communities. These included representatives from parishes, Catholic schools, agencies and other communities. These animators attended a formation day lead by the National Plenary Council Facilitator.

From here many parishes and communities implemented the “Listening and Dialogue” sessions which resulted in significant numbers of submissions from the Diocese of Broken Bay towards the national conversation. Several Diocesan events throughout the year also had a link to a “Year of Listening” in support of this discernment process. This led to the start of the second phase of the Listening and Discernment process.

A second animator gathering was then held in April 2021 to re-launch the plenary journey following the COVID delay and to commission delegates. Prayer resources were also developed together with the holding of a prayer vigil for participants prior to the first plenary session in 2021. The Diocese of Broken Bay had a total of 930 submissions: 343 group submissions and 587 individual submissions. The submissions represented a total of 16,820 individuals from the Diocese ranging from 13-80+ years of age.

Synod on Youth

In 2017 the Diocese of Broken Bay lead a Diocesan process for the 2018 Synod of Bishops XV Ordinary Assembly: Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment.

The Diocese established a diocesan reference group to plan for young people’s engagement with the Synod. The reference group identified three main avenues through which to collect data for the Synod report:

- Reflections on the lived experiences of the Reference Group members: Involved members of the reference group drawing on their own experiences and conclusions from the online survey and video booth responses.
- The ACBC Online Survey: a national survey that young people would complete online.
- Live consultations via a CYBB Synod ‘Video Booth’ initiative: consisted of young people sharing their thoughts via video at various Catholic Youth Broken Bay events.

Altogether, approx. 1300 young people responded, 1249 via online survey and 50 via video booth.

DISCERNMENT OF COLLECTED CONTRIBUTIONS

The Diocesan Taskforce for the 2023 Synod of Bishops was asked to discern the principle fruits that came out of the five synodal processes discussed, with greater weight given to the three linked processes. This discernment centred on the guiding question of the Synod of Bishops process and included both individual and group discernment sessions:

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”?

This report splits the guiding question into two:

1 How we as the community of the Church of Broken Bay are currently journeying together in proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ?

2 How the Holy Spirit invites the community of the Church of Broken Bay to grow in synodality?

Part two is further split into the three main themes of the Synod which were:

a) Communion b) Participation c) Mission

The fruits of our discernment will be discussed according to each of the above three themes.

HOW WE AS THE COMMUNITY OF THE CHURCH OF BROKEN BAY ARE CURRENTLY JOURNEYING TOGETHER IN PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST

The proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ is central to our life as Catholics. We believe that the Church “exists in order to evangelise”¹ and this reality is at the heart of synodality. With this in mind, the community of the Church of Broken Bay has identified the following positive examples of our synodal journey:

- Our efforts to engage in synodal processes focused on listening and dialogue e.g. PDCC, PM. Whilst the processes haven’t always been perfect, people acknowledge that the more we run them, the better we get at learning how to listen and dialogue as a Church community.
- During the consultation phase/listening and discerning sessions of a number of the synodal processes (Plenary, PDCC), people acknowledged the rich and fruitful dialogue as well as a genuine presence of the Holy Spirit leading those sessions. They saw this as a strength of the synodal process, as opposed to simply filling out a survey.
- People also acknowledged that some of their feedback during the synodal processes was actioned quickly (e.g. moving submission closing dates back to allow more time to respond), which demonstrated genuine listening. Others also appreciated having community facilitators appointed as it allowed them to truly listen to the needs of their own communities.
- Annual Mass of Inclusion celebrating those with special needs in the community, followed by a time of fellowship. One participant noted how touched they were in seeing those with special needs joyfully participating in the Mass.
- Regular meetings between clergy and Catholic school principals creating stronger opportunities for dialogue
- Annual Liturgy of Lament, which is a diocesan response to historical child sex abuse by the Bishop, clergy and the leadership in the Diocese. A number of respondents cited this as an example of the Diocese truly listening to those who for so long may not have been given a voice.
- Community dinners which invite the marginalised into the community of the Church
- A strong sense amongst some members of the community of being truly discerning of the movements of the Holy Spirit within the community of the Church. Stories were shared of how God had worked in their lives, and how they continue to be guided by God’s call.

COMMUNION

- Large events allowing for deep encounters with God allowed many people to feel as though they were unified in their faith journeys. One example provided was World Youth Day.
- Some parishes were recognised as living synodality through regular meetings, identifying people's gifts, and inviting people to attend Mass.

WHAT STEPS DOES THE SPIRIT INVITE US TO TAKE IN ORDER TO GROW IN OUR JOURNEYING TOGETHER?

The taskforce noticed that there was a number of common themes emerging amongst the several synodal processes. Of course, there were also themes that were unique to the individual processes. However, those responses that related most to the central question (and three main themes) were given priority. The fruits of this discernment for each theme were considered using the following four key determinants:

- **Common themes:** the themes that seemed to emerge most regularly amongst the voices
- **Obstacles, difficulties, wounds and concerns:** issues and concerns that people considered a priority to be addressed
- **Interesting, innovative and enlightening:** suggestions that were not necessarily common, but were seen as compelling ideas on how to move forward
- **Discordant and marginal:** points of view that were not following the norm or were in the minority, but could potentially shine a light on something the Holy Spirit may wish to show us in our local Church context

The following highlights what was heard and what was discerned using the three main themes of: Communion, Mission and Participation.

What was heard

A strong desire for greater inclusivity is needed from the community of the Church. In particular, the following groups were identified as being on the margins and most in need of inclusion:

- Young people
- New migrants
- Refugees
- Prisoners
- Single parents
- People with disabilities
- People struggling with mental health
- Domestic violence victims
- People from various ethnic backgrounds
- People who identify as sexually diverse
- Indigenous Australians
- Women
- Divorced
- Elderly
- Homeless

The **need for the Church to truly listen to its members**, especially the laity. Many people expressed feeling alienated and frustrated, questioning the Church's hierarchy in this regard. Some also questioned whether the synodal processes were fostering genuine "listening." At the same time, there was a great sense of openness to change and renewal in the future of the Church. People showed a genuine hope in becoming more synodal as a Church with listening and dialogue central to this view. The community of the Church was positive that increasing in synodality would assist in all aspects of the Church and Christian life.

Many people spoke passionately of how **the Sacraments (Eucharist and Reconciliation) and prayer were** crucial for the Church to truly grow in journeying together through united celebration. There were strong calls for a deeper reverence, vibrancy and diversity in the celebration of Mass (e.g. animated contemporary liturgy and traditional liturgy as an example of "fostering unity, not uniformity"). Prayer was seen as a way of achieving greater peace and hope, and inspiring us by highlighting our common purpose. "The Spirit wants us to sit at the feet of Jesus and adore Him, and let Him love us."

A small number of responses called for a return to **traditional Church practices** as the best way for the Church to move forward in unity through liturgy, e.g. offering the Traditional Latin Mass, traditional liturgical and prayer practices, public processions on Holy Days, and more traditional Church architecture.

A deep sense of hurt and experiences of pain and anger were evident in relation to the **historical child sex-abuse scandals** and the Church's past handling of such cases. There were concerns around needing to do more to address these issues in order to move forward in our journey as a community.

People spoke with a great sense of joy when expressing the Church's **need to affirm the uniqueness and spiritual charisms** of individuals. Celebrating the universal nature of the Church was seen as a crucial means of evangelisation and dialogue. This type of joy was identified as very attractive and a great way to help people encounter Christ through relationships, accompaniment, and compassion. More vibrant and engaging events were also recognised by some as an effective means of journeying together.

A greater priestly presence amongst the laity and outside the parish was suggested as an opportunity to draw more people into the Church, journeying alongside them. Priests moving out from the comfort of their parishes in order to provide opportunities to connect and offer faith formation opportunities in other contexts were some examples highlighted.

There were some voices that called for more of the faithful to speak the truth of the faith in courage, whilst others expressed concern that speaking the truth bluntly would lead to divisiveness. There were also those who took the middle ground encouraging meeting people where they are at without judgement or prejudice, while at the same time **speaking the truth of the faith with charity**. On the other hand, others lamented the **difficulty in living out many of the Church's teachings** (e.g. moral teachings) and the Church's overly strict and unwavering nature.

What was discerned

In order for the community of the Church of Broken Bay to move forward effectively in unity, we must be a community centred firmly on the person of Jesus Christ. Prayer and the Sacraments should, therefore, form the basis of our journey.

We feel the need to foster a deep sense of listening to the people of God and find effective ways for those on the margins to experience the love of God and understand their dignity as human beings made in God's image and likeness. Affirming the unique charisms of the people in the Diocese is crucial in order to be truly inclusive, which means finding ways to celebrate the contemporary, traditional and everything in between. We must also strive to give everyone a voice, while assisting them in their search for purpose, so that the fullness of the truth may be properly discerned, heard and proclaimed.

Finally, we believe it is important to foster ways that all people in the Church (Bishop, clergy, laity) can come together in prayer, celebration and gatherings that allow us to encounter Christ as one community.

MISSION

What was heard

Passionate calls to return to a more faithful imitation of Jesus and authentic teachings of the Catholic faith were strong. Examples included the need for a greater focus on good works, walking with people, increased trust in God, exuding joy, and a renewed call to living holiness.

Closely linked to this were a strong number of voices emphasising the need for improved formation and catechesis in order that people may better understand and share their faith journey. People particularly recognised the need for this focus in our Catholic schools.

A greater focus on the common **call to evangelise** was seen as a priority for the Church to move forward and continue its journey effectively in today's society. In particular, outreach to youth was highlighted as a priority. Many respondents also put forward strong opinions on the need for the Church go out to the peripheries in mission. Examples provided focused on various human rights issues (refugees, homelessness, care for vulnerable) and the care for the environment citing Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si*.

Families and the challenges that they experience were seen as an area we need to pay more attention to as a Church. Creating opportunities for greater dialogue, journeying with couples postmarriage, making families feel welcome and having more flexibility around parish programs to accommodate families were some examples given as to how we can foster a flourishing of family life and journey more closely with families in our community.

There was an apparent desire to further **strengthen the connections between parishes, Catholic schools and CatholicCare** in the Diocese. Many respondents could see the benefits of such connections and were adamant that this was key to more fruitful dialogue, and to work together to carry out the Church's mission. This call for greater collaboration also extended to other Christian denominations. There were many calls for **greater unity between our community and our protestant brothers and sisters** in order enhance dialogue, grow in synodality, and to learn from other churches that are effective in mission and outreach.

Concerns were raised around a growing **perception that the Church has become irrelevant** and out of touch with the modern world. Respondents cited time-poor families giving the faith much lower priority. There was also a call for the Church to engage more with the culture of local communities so that the face of the Church reflects the

face of the community, e.g. the communities in the Central Coast region are "beach-loving", yet the Church doesn't reflect that reality. Linked to this were ideas centred on more creative use of social media and Church assets in order to engage others and resource the Church's mission more effectively. Leaning into the gifts of the laity to do so was suggested as an effective way to journey together on mission.

A **greater creativity** around how we experience parish life was also suggested as a way to more closely journey together. Parishes dialoguing around forming regional hubs was one recommendation.

What was discerned

Central to our mission as the Church is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ so that others may come to an encounter with Christ and grow in relationship with Him. To this end, we must inspire the faithful toward a more authentic imitation of Christ.

Formation and catechesis are key to assist the faithful in holding firm to the foundation of the faith, striving toward our universal call to holiness. This, in turn, empowers us to engage in mission and outreach, taking the love of God in us to those on the peripheries.

Forming the fundamental unit of society, families must be better supported within the community of the Church. It is also clear we need to create stronger connections between parishes, Catholic schools, agencies of the Church, as well as other Christian Churches in order to both learn from one another and build each other up in our common call to mission.

Finally, we recognise the need to be creative in our missionary journey, paying particular attention to how we can engage with the cultures of our regions, taking into consideration that we are called to be in the world but not of the world.

PARTICIPATION

What was heard

A strong, hopeful and passionate plea was heard around empowering the laity and promoting genuine co-responsibility. The people showed a great enthusiasm to be involved in all aspects of Church life and at all levels.

Some examples centred on the desire for the laity to use their gifts and participate more deeply in ministry and evangelisation initiatives. There was also a desire for the voices of the laity to be given greater bearing in the life of the Church.

Many people drew on their own personal experiences of being led by the Holy Spirit and experiencing deep encounters with Jesus Christ. These experiences formed the basis of their pleas for a renewed call to live a **life led by the Holy Spirit**. This was presented as fundamental to deepening a culture of discernment and synodality amongst the faithful.

The **role of women** in the community of the Church was viewed as a highly important aspect to achieving growth in synodality. There was a general desire for women to have greater leadership roles in all parts of Church life centered on authority, co-responsibility and a stronger voice for lay and consecrated women. The idea of female clergy was also raised.

Priesthood and the role of clergy was discussed regularly and with varied opinions. A number of respondents described issues concerning clergy and our community's journey together in mission e.g. priests drowning in administration and work, clericalism, institutional child abuse, lack of 'homegrown' vocations. Some suggestions to improve these challenges were offered, including greater assistance from and collaboration with laity, as well as married and female clergy.

Other voices offered an impassioned plea that no doctrinal changes are made to the priesthood, instead, encouraging a return to faithfully living out the core aspects of priesthood. They mentioned their opposition to calls for married and female clergy and highlighted the impact of the witness of faithful clergy on the flourishing of our community.

There was also a common tone around the **bureaucratic systems of the Church**. They were seen by many as a genuine obstacle in carrying out the Church's mission. Examples given were processes being too long, structures and systems unsupportive of living the Gospel, a lack of transparency around decisions made by Church hierarchy, and a lack of acknowledgement of the gifts of the laity.

Finally, **ongoing synodal and listening processes** were considered important to keep synodality in the Church growing. Consideration of processes whereby the Church can listen to laity deeply over extended periods of time and vice-versa was seen as a positive opportunity.

What was discerned

A life guided by the Holy Spirit is the foundation of genuine discernment and true synodality. We are called to empower the lay faithful to discern their mission in the community and give them opportunities to serve.

Women in particular must be affirmed in the uniqueness of their call and especially in how they are called to lead, creating opportunities for them to do so and making sure that open dialogue continues.

We need to support our clergy in their priesthood through prayer, friendship, gratitude and service. We must also help inspire them to continue being faithful to their call through our own faithfulness and witness.

We, as members of Christ's Church, must be led completely by the Spirit and not allow the bureaucracy of the Church to stifle God's call or His will in our lives, particularly as we journey together as a community.

Finally, we need to continue growing in synodality by learning from the past and looking to the future with hope and joy.

CONCLUSION

The community of the Church of Broken Bay is one that is marked by love and a genuine desire to work together for a better future. Overall, permeating through the responses was a great sense of hope for the future and openness to renewal. The community showed a genuine listening heart, and despite the struggles, frustrations and difficulties experienced, a willingness to move forward and be guided by the Holy Spirit.

Bishop Anthony Randazzo, in his Pastoral Letter to the community of the Church of Broken Bay entitled *Jesus Christ, Our Beginning and Our End*, made the point that “Unity calls for a radical conversion to the Gospel.” Expanding further he stated:

“Each day brings opportunities for the Spirit to change our minds and hearts, to guide us on the way and to bring us to a radically new way of living the Good News of Jesus Christ. These opportunities are ways that God enters our lives and how we, as disciples of the Lord, make mystical contact with God. By and large they are the ordinary moments of life, and yet so often we seek God in the extraordinary of the supernatural, as if God is in some far distant heaven. Instead, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God meets us in day to day life and especially in our moments of interior silence, prayer and contemplation.”

In this spirit of prayer, discernment and reliance on the grace of God, we commit to continue our synodal journey as the community of the Church of Broken Bay.

NEXT STEPS

The following highlights some concrete actions that we feel the Holy Spirit is calling us to as the community of the Church of Broken Bay.

1 Concerning formal synodal processes

- We will produce reports and be clear about concrete actions we intend to take as the outcome of each formal synodal process undertaken, acknowledging the purpose and goal of the particular process. This includes:
- Producing two documents for the Pastoral Mission which highlight the purpose, mission, goals, objectives and initiatives of Evangelisation Broken Bay and ways they are able to support and serve the community of the Church. These documents will be released in May 2022.

- Producing a report with the key findings of the Pastoral Discernment Central Coast project, demonstrating ways the Diocese might better serve the needs of the community in that region.
- We will take key learnings from each synodal process and apply them to similar processes in order to continue our journey and practice of synodality, and identify better ways to serve the community of the Church. This includes:
- Starting a similar journey as that of the PDCC with the other two regions of the Diocese
- Assisting and supporting parishes in their own synodal journeys
- We will show greater transparency through more regularly sharing information on various synodal processes and our intentions for undertaking this journey as a community of the Church.

2 Concerning our synodal journey of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ together:

- Affirm the vision of our Bishop and work to implement it with commitment and integrity.
- Prioritise faith formation based on authentic Catholic teaching, grounded in the person of Jesus Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- Provide opportunities for the Catholic community to come together in prayer and celebration of the Sacraments, acknowledging the various charisms of individuals.
- Reanimate the Diocesan Liturgical Commission which will look at ways that the Diocese can foster greater unity through the proclamation of the Gospel in beautiful liturgy and worship.
- Include well-formed and gifted lay Catholics in assisting with the formation of clergy
- Celebrate the leadership roles of women in the Diocese of Broken Bay and continue building up and supporting faithful Catholic women in such positions.
- Engage the Diocesan community to seek ways in which to implement the outcomes of the Fifth Plenary Council of the Church in Australia.