

Go out into the Deep: Become the Church Christ calls us to be

EXHIBITION DRAFT

Synthesis for the Synod of Bishops, Diocese of Parramatta

Having listened

Having listened with diligence to the voices of the people of the Diocese and attempting to discern the Spirit within those voices and the circumstances of this local church, we submit the following Synthesis to the Synod of Bishops.

In the consultation and discernment process, we have welcomed the contributions from at least 650 people from within the region, either in group or individual submissions. These respondents have ranged in age from 16 years to old age; almost equally divided between women and men, with about 40 percent being under 18 years. Respondents come from diverse cultural groups that characterise our region, which is also home to the nation's largest urban Aboriginal population.

In reading, reflecting and responding to these voices, our focus has been the core questions of the Synod process:

- *How does this “journeying together” strengthen our proclamation of the good news of Jesus?*
- *What steps is the Spirit inviting us to take to become a more synodal Church?*

The Voices

In listening to the those making submissions, we heard voices that spoke out with courage and *parrhesia* of:

- **respect** and seriousness of purpose in all but a few submissions,
- **gratitude** for the initiatives already underway in the diocese, parishes, ministries and service of individuals,
- **enthusiasm** for a Church where it lives out the vision of Vatican II and of Pope Francis,
- **determination** to work towards such a Church,
- **joy and gratitude** for the blessings of the people of the Diocese, and
- **hope** that springs from the invitation that this synodal process represents.

We also heard voices that spoke of

- **disappointment** in a Church that is moving too slowly towards greater synodality, or failing to read and respond to the signs of the times (with a missionary impulse),
- **lamentation** from those who grieve for a Church that is no longer a place of unchanging “tradition”,
- **anger** about abuse of power, of neglect of those who are more vulnerable and about lack of transparency and
- **frustration** from those who desire to play more active roles as co-responsible members in their local Church community,

We welcomed the voices of those who consider themselves **unchurched and non-believers**, as well as those who, while identifying as Catholic, no longer participate in regular worship with the liturgical assembly. We are pleased to have heard the voices of **LGBTQIA+** members of the faithful, while we are saddened by the pain and marginalisation they have experienced. We are especially humbled and saddened by the pain of **Aboriginal brothers and sisters**, whose experience of trauma leaves them “exhausted from trying to be heard in the church”. We are inspired by submissions from members of **religious congregations**, from members of one of the **Eastern rites** within the diocese, and from Diocesan **agencies**.

We are gladdened by the honour done to this process through submissions from members of the **Jewish, Muslim and Hindu** communities; while the number of representations was small, we are moved by their encouragement to us in this synodal journey. Finally, we have read carefully and listened with our hearts and minds to the more than 100 submissions which reflect the hopes, disappointments and persistent faith of the **women, men and youth** of our local church here in Parramatta.

The Journey

The discernment process highlighted the **pain and alienation** experienced by some people of the Diocese. In particular, the Synthesis is poorer for the absence of voices from Aboriginal communities of the region. This absence reflects upon us as Church and, despite the committed efforts of some individuals, our failure overall as a Church to invite...to sufficiently listen... listen...to listen again... and to act.

We are surprised by the strength of feeling expressed by those responding with concern about the current direction of the church towards synodality and seeking to return to a **more certain way of “tradition”**. We heard in their voices a real lamentation. We also discerned something of an indictment for our failure as a Church to effectively support believers towards a more informed adult faith.

The process highlighted for the Writing Group significant **challenges** in the way we as a Diocesan Church **communicate** within and across the region. It was very evident to us throughout the writing process that many of the faithful were denied the opportunity to be involved in this process which was impacted to a degree by circumstances of pandemic lockdowns, Christmas season, long summer holidays etc. We are edified by those who did respond, but we sense with considerable disappointment that most parishioners in the pews on Sunday would be **unaware of the Synod and of the Diocesan process of consultation** and discernment. For those of us familiar with organisational life, we have difficulty understanding how a clear priority for the Church, which comes from the Pope himself, and is handed on by our Bishop, appears not to be a priority for every parish and agency of the Diocese.

Some submissions were not directed to the questions posed in the Preparatory Document and *Vademecum* but to a question put to them around the relevance of the Church. In most instances, we were able to read in the sentiment of these submissions the intent of writers relating to the Church's life and mission and we have considered them in our reflections. There were nine submissions which rejected the validity of the Synodal process.

The Audience

Our hope is that this Synthesis will provide a practical tool as the people of the Diocese journey forward, **exercising synodality in this particular Church** in this place, in a way that contributes to the synodal conversion and experience of the **whole Universal Church**. “As Pope Francis has emphasised, ‘only to the extent that these organisations keep connected to the *base* and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape’.”¹

¹ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, 2018, para 77, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_synodalita_en.html

How is our experience of “journeying together” strengthening our proclamation of the good news of Jesus in the Diocese of Parramatta?

From the consultation process we discerned seven key themes relating to how we are journeying together in the Diocese of Parramatta at this time. None of these themes stands in isolation. They intersect and contribute to each other. The consultation and discernment process lead us to make the following key statements:

1. The synodality that is **already being experienced** in the Diocese of Parramatta gives us hope for the Church’s future mission.
2. Parishes, diocesan agencies and ministries who practise greater synodality experience a **journey of transformation and cultural change**.
3. **Leadership** that **fosters synodality** and is **accountable** and **transparent** encourages imaginative initiatives and a greater involvement by a wider group of the faithful, with all their gifts, in the mission of the Church.
4. Those who experience **education and formation** underpinned by sound theology and scripture, are nurtured in an adult faith while they exercise their mission arising from their Baptism.
5. Our shared sense of proclaiming the good news of Jesus is strengthened and enriched when the **diversity and difference**, which are the hallmarks of our region, are celebrated within our church life and worship, and when the women, men and children of the Diocese experience that **inclusive sense of belonging** that they long for.
6. Creative, inclusive and welcoming **liturgy** that reflects the community’s diversity strengthens the **communion** of the faithful in their mission.
7. **Partnership and collaboration** within the Diocesan church, between local church communities, and with the wider society energises and unites diverse people to work for the common good in a shared mission of good news for our world and creation.

Underpinning each of these themes is the core **Mission** of the local Church to make the good news of God’s love and compassion, as shown to us in Jesus Christ, present in the lives of all people. This is **a mission shared by all the faithful through our baptism**. Synodality, the way of being Church to which we are called at this time, is at the service of this mission - to enliven, strengthen and constantly renew it.

For clarity, we will elucidate each theme briefly. Direct quotes from submissions are highlighted in colour and italics. The concluding section of the Synthesis focuses on the question, “What steps does the Spirit invite our Diocese to take to grow in journeying together?” We will identify the actions that the Diocese commits to in response to this discernment.

1. The synodality that is **already being experienced** in the Diocese of Parramatta gives us hope for the Church's future mission.

We have heard through the consultation process examples of synodality in our Diocese which include:

- The 2019 Diocesan Forum, “Go out into the Deep”
- Pastoral Councils at a Diocesan and Deanery level
- Some well-functioning Parish Pastoral Councils
- Diocesan leaders who are open to take steps to implement a more listening Church
- Schools in multi-faith communities who live out a culture of intentional welcome and inclusion with deliberate and collaborative leadership
- The leadership of Catholic schools across all states and territories in Australia
- Agencies of care and health that reach out to everyone regardless of faith, practice, culture and lifestyle
- The initiative of “Listening Circles”²
 - Diocesan Interfaith Commission and Columban Centre for Christian Muslim Relations based in the diocese.
 - The wisdom and practice of members of Religious Institutes
 - “Walking with Refugees” initiative of Diocese taken up by parishes
 - Initiatives that provide a space for listening with Aboriginal communities, such as Yarning Groups, Jarara Indigenous Education Unit, activities centred around the parish of Emerton, Catholic Care, Reconciliation Action Plans (CEDP and Sisters of St Joseph)
 - Individual believers who strive in many ways to listen to the Spirit in their attention to the Word, Church teaching, the people they encounter, in creation and in the signs of the time.

There is, in the Diocese, “a desire and confidence to journey in ways which offer liberation for people”.

² “Listening Circles” provide a safe space, time and an authentic audience where the voices of those who have been impacted by abuse, betrayal, neglect, distress and trauma can be heard. Listening Circles begin the journey of restoration from harm.

2. Parishes, diocesan agencies and ministries who practise greater synodality experience a journey of transformation and cultural change.

The need for *Cultural Change* is one of the most significant themes emerging from the submissions in terms of frequency and one in which there were strongly divergent views.

Submissions spoke of seeking a Church with a **culture of inclusion, welcome, outreach and shared responsibility** among all, clergy and faithful.

Pope Francis's leadership in reform is an **ongoing journey in transformation** that

“needs expression in local structures. Whilst the Vatican II Council process and documents were successful in calling the people of God to engage and participate, so that the Church and society could flourish, it failed to reform the structural components of clericalism”.

Structures need to reflect the vision of synodality so they “allow us to practically journey together.”

Synodality is a *way of being Church* towards which we strive. The Church is always in need of conversion. **Leaders were seen as critical** to the formation and promotion of culture in the church, as in any organisation.

There was a strong call for a **shift in culture** in the local Church so that the **communion of all the baptised** is more evident and their **co-responsibility** for the Church's mission recognised and given expression in structures and practices especially at parish level. Submissions specifically asked for the greater inclusion of **women in leadership** and in ordained ministries, and a **culture of welcome** to the divorced and members of the LBGTQIA+ community.

*“To journey together as one body of Christ, **brave dialogue and active intentional effort must occur.** Non-heterosexual relationships are **not to be feared**...LBGTQIA+ people are to be intentionally included in Catholic ministries without condition on their relationship or marital status.”*

Suggested strategies included pastoral letters affirming a Catholic theology of inclusion of

all people; parishes and places of worship as places demonstrating a culture of welcome and safety for all people to pray, “regardless of sexual orientation or relationship status.”

Other respondents noted **an imperative for recognising women** “in every facet of Catholic life...”

“Without women visible as church leaders, there will be no church worthy of leading.”

“We need to rid ourself (sic) of the misogynistic rules which allow sexual discrimination even in these times.”

Practical strategies that were named around this theme included the Spirit calling the Church to allow the faithful to contribute to the **choice of bishops**, but “not in a political or democratic way”; removal of the gaps between the faithful and clergy, such as by removing “**titles of superiority**”. Allowing priests to marry was seen as potentially providing an important recognition of the partnership women should hold in the Church, while **restoring “balance and the trust** that has been lost as a consequence of the institutional abuse”.

At the same time, some submissions reflected disappointment about **current Church culture**, some using very different language from those summarised above. The following submission typifies the sentiment of this group.

*We thank the Diocese of Parramatta for giving us the opportunity to voice our view on the direction the Church should move. We urge our Bishop and Holy Father to give the faithful the fullness of the faith both in belief and practice... change their direction and **urgently return to tradition.**”*

Another submission noted.

“After Vatican 2, it seemed the church doors and windows were opened, and a fresh breeze blew through renewing the church and us as individuals. In recent years it seems the doors have been closed again and we have gone backwards instead of forwards... Let's open the doors and windows again and let the Spirit completely blow the cobwebs away or we will be

faced with ever dwindling congregations of old folk.”

These are **very different orientations**,

challenging to reconcile. Yet, both come from **faith**. Both voices expressed pain and a measure of lamentation. **All voices need to be heard** and responded to.

One submission from a family offered a voice of hope between the two positions:

*“The Catholic Church is steeped in tradition. Tradition is important in a shared understanding that is communicated within and between generations. However, **in order to move forward, the Catholic Church needs to make significant changes** ... We feel this can be done while maintaining some of our traditions while ceasing to practise others.*

3. **Leadership that fosters synodality and is accountable and transparent** encourages imaginative initiatives and a greater involvement by a wider group of the faithful, with all their gifts, in the mission of the Church.

In this theme, submissions noted:

All the faithful share in the leadership/co responsibility for mission by virtue of their baptism. Some feel blocked from exercising this co-responsibility; some would welcome direction on how to exercise leadership.

Leadership that is welcoming, service oriented, united in mission and ready to reach out to the margins, especially at the local parish level, is possible. It has been done. **It can be done.**

*“Those priests and bishops (ours especially) that are **willing to share their power** through parish councils, respectful dialogue, communities; thrive.”*

Some priests appear to lack understanding about what Pope Francis means by a conversion to synodality or perhaps **how to implement** it. Submissions urged the Church to learn from **good practice outside the Church** as has happened in the ministries of education and health with attention to people management. This applies to those in ordained ministries as well as those in other leadership roles.

*“Team members need to be given power to co-decide key decisions with the clergy, using a discernment process to assist in decision making. There needs to be transparency and accountability in financial processes and all decision making. Lay people at all levels should be included in decision making thus **utilising everyone’s gifts and talents.**”*

Some disappointment was expressed around provisions, such as Parish Pastoral Councils.

*“(Parish) **goals are not well articulated.** Our parish does not have a mission statement. We have had an autocratic pastor who made all the decisions. No co-responsibility.”*

Parish Pastoral Councils do not exist in some parishes or the spirit of synodality is stymied by a clerical-centric approach; many submissions

noted the **lack of accountability** to the parish community when an incoming parish priest

abandoned existing parish priorities and practices and arbitrarily brought things to a halt.

*“I have had **some feeling of synodality** working with other parishioners with a different pastor. My experience on parish council over many years has been that they are a waste of time as the pastor mainly appointed those he liked and then did as he wished.”*

A call for greater accountability was also reflected in those voices that asked for **greater initiative** especially at parish level, in reaching out to the young, the unchurched and to seize opportunities to build community.

*“The need for **good transition of parish priests** was highlighted as the damage done to parishes with a new PP coming in and 'starting from scratch' was noted to be very damaging to a community.”*

There is appreciation and respect when **good processes** are in place. Of particular note, is the story of a religious institute of women and their journey since Vatican II into synodality and into bold new areas of mission, supported by a budget aligned with values.

A minority voice came through responses to two postings on Facebook intentionally directed towards those who would **not normally associate with church**. Lack of transparency around finance and accountability in the management of sexual abuse, in particular, were strongly criticised.

4. *Those who experience **education and formation** underpinned by sound theology and scripture, are nurtured in an adult faith while they exercise the mission arising from their Baptism.*

Education and Formation emerged as a theme. Developing a **shared understanding of “synodality”** is key to the synodal journey. This requires the Diocese to recruit appropriate personnel with the skills and capabilities to develop the formation programmes to support such initiatives.

One submission offered a definition for leadership consistent with synodality:

*“Synodal leadership has certain **key characteristics**: being mission-oriented to the pastoral needs of this place at this; open to inclusive dialogue and mutual listening; humble and service oriented; open to conversion, change and the bidding of the Spirit; committed to discerning decisions within a local community. All of these are based on a faith that recognises the priesthood of all the faithful and the unerring ‘sensus fidei’ of the whole People of God.”*

Another submission lamented:

*“Synodality has never been a goal of formation for our local Church community. Synodality is a nature of the Church that I’ve never heard of before until the opening of this Synod. There are **no ways of formation** being used by our local Church to foster synodality, especially when it comes to making decisions, consulting, and governing in the Church, well not in any direct or conscious way. ... we need people with expertise in collaborative working, listening ...”*

There is a call for

*“...lay people need to be given **training in formation and spiritual discernment**, so they use the 3H (Head-Heart-Hand) paradigm effectively. Delving deeper into the Scripture*

through hermeneutical approach is imperative for equipping more people with theological knowledge.”

Even though there are existing adult and youth education and formation program conducted by the Mission Enhancement Team (MET) and Catholic schools in the Diocese, the educational activities occurring within parishes is disparate, and **more opportunities** for adult education and formation in theology and spirituality for both adults and youth are called for.

*“Parishes continue to operate as silos and the opportunity to meet together and share resources or grow together is missed. ...How do we encourage and share such initiatives and **work better together** as communities instead of being siloed parishes?”*

Given that Greater Western Sydney is home to the nation’s largest urban Aboriginal population, an understanding of the **rich spirituality of the indigenous cultures** is identified as an area of education and spirituality required for the development of synodality.

*“**Deep Listening** to our aboriginal brothers and sisters can better inform our church ...”*

A minority of voices called for education and formation based on a pre-synodal understanding of the Church.

*“Our Church needs **more teaching on Tradition**, the True Presence, the Sacraments, the Mass, The Bible, the Catechism, our Saints, Church History, appreciation of Church Art and Architecture through the Ages, the role of the Catholic Church in evangelising and civilising the world, greater respect to Christ in the Liturgy.”*

5. Our shared sense of proclaiming the good news of Jesus is strengthened and enriched when the **diversity and difference**, which are the hallmarks of our region, are celebrated within our church life and worship, and when the women, men and children of the Diocese experience that **inclusive sense of belonging** that they long for.

We recognise **Inclusion, Diversity and Difference** as an emerging theme. “**Openness to the other**” would be an appropriate hallmark of the diocese, which is home to a **culturally and spiritually diverse** population because of migration and affordable housing.

Many parish liturgies reflect this diversity. Some parishes actively support **specific cultural communities** and there are many migrant chaplaincies operating in the diocese. Many parishes are active in **supporting refugees** within their communities.

There is the call to actively accept **Aboriginal spirituality** and seek ways to incorporate these into liturgies, with sensitivity and care to avoid cultural appropriation.

*“The contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics to the life, mission, spirituality, worship and governance of the Church is greatly appreciated but **constitutes unfinished business ...**”*

The voices of the LGBTQIA+ call for inclusion and acceptance and this is **supported by many** who recognise that we are all made in the **image and likeness of God** and we all have the right to be treated equally.

“Overall, as one respondent expressed “I still see the same judgemental and discriminatory attitudes and teachings”. We have much work ahead of us.”

Another submission wrote: *“We live in a Kairos moment, where the Gospel is calling us to **live courageously and authentically** and thus, the synodal journey is incomplete without the full and equal participation of LGBTQIA+ Catholics.”*

of the Church and precipitates the falling numbers of practising Catholics.

In recognising our common Baptism, the voices of those from **other rites** of the Church feel that much of their rich tradition could be **shared** and incorporated in the Liturgy.

*“It is perplexing to me that with such a multicultural country as Australia, there is not more done to include their cultural practices of celebrating liturgy... (We) should be inclusive to both Eastern rites and Roman rites, ordinary and extraordinary forms. **Each is beautiful and unique** and builds appreciation for each other. People feel resentment when only one form or rite is esteemed, and other forms are suppressed.”*

It is important that we listen to those from the Diocese’s diverse cultures who find nourishment in the traditional Church.

“We hope that a synodal process will involve forming an understanding and an inclusion of those who love the old rites.”

With a large multi-faith population in Greater Western Sydney, acceptance and recognition of all peoples call to the Church to consider ways to walk with people of other faiths and **celebrate commonalities**. The Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations actively promotes dialogue with the Islamic Community. Schools of the Diocese support many young men and women from these communities.

*“An emphasis on Interreligious Dialogue with our neighbour, brothers and sisters of **other faiths and those with no faith** is so important as we live in a very multicultural and multi-ethnic society.”*

A minority of voices regard the recognition of other faiths and LGBTQIA+ as creeping relativism which **diminishes the authority**

There were calls for us as Church to learn to
be comfortable with the differences
between us and not to fear **robust dialogue.**

6. Creative, inclusive and welcoming **liturgy** that reflects the community's diversity strengthens the **communion** of the faithful in their mission.

*"If the Liturgy is the "Source & Summit of the Church's Life", its theology & prayers, (especially its Eucharistic Prayers), & homilies MUST be infused much more with the knowledge gained from Cosmology, Psychology, Sociology, etc. as must be its structure & leadership. Perhaps then **I might be able to return & recommit.** In the meantime, with my short life, I must seek the "food" to sustain me, from Jesus, but not within the Catholic Church."*

We heard appreciation for the liturgy as the **expression of our faith**, and the recognition that it provides the **basis of synodality**. Some respondents yearn for more community activities based around worship.

A reduction in clericalism and more formation for the parish community were seen as leading to **more creative** liturgies. Many people would like to see our liturgies become more enlivened and inclusive, with **"more love"** in the language of the prayers and readings. People reacted negatively to the emphasis on sin and sinfulness in the Eucharist instead of on the **joy of being children of God**.

Some sense that people in **marginalised** groups are not welcomed at Sunday celebrations and noted that there needs to be more inclusion of those not attending Mass.

For some the Traditional Latin Mass brings a **different beauty** to that of the *Novus Ordo*, without impinging on the call to become a synodal church. Others feel marginalised for their **preference for both the TLM and traditional pre-Vatican II ways** of being church.

An Eastern Church community dreams of celebrating their Syriac Mass in English so they can more easily welcome members of the Roman church. They also see their way of being church as **particularly synodal**,

with a parish council, or *Prathinidhi yogam*, composed of representatives of smaller local wards and strong emphasis on teaching of the faith to children.

"...the challenges of integration and inclusion of many cultures in respect to celebrating liturgy and involvement in church life are very complex but need to be addressed as we journey together towards synodality."

Worship and prayer shared with other Christian churches is a powerful means of working towards Christian unity, as are simple intentional ecumenical gatherings, especially but not limited to, those organised between Christian ministers.

"The longer they met together the longer they would pray together."

"The promotion of lay ministries and participation of the faithful in the Church's mission is paradoxically achieved through the liturgy itself, and through the preaching and good example of the bishops of the entire Church."

We heard that **acknowledgement of the original inhabitants and custodians of the land** we live on could become more prominent in our celebrations and places of work and worship; that Aboriginal Spirituality could be included more in our celebrations; and hopes that more will be done to facilitate the flourishing of Aboriginal communities, through healing, through journeying with them, and more formal action for **reconciliation**.

"The liturgy is definitely a means (and end) by which synodality is achieved, formed and fostered, but is achieved indirectly and subconsciously. I'm sure after this Synod the Church will be more aware of the power and importance of the liturgy, and hopefully there'll be more people participating in the liturgy, particularly in non-sacramental liturgies, and in greater communion and friendship with the consecrated and ordained members."

7. **Partnership and collaboration** within the Diocesan church, between local church communities, and with the wider society energises and unites diverse people to work for the common good in a shared mission of good news for our world and creation.

Synodal partnerships or collaborations are recognised as the fruits of the Holy Spirit. They appear among submissions as actual experiences or aspirations.

A school whose students gather from a variety of faith traditions has built a collaborative partnership between school staff, the local parish priest and the multifaith parent community because this is essential to its mission of **faithfully bringing the Catholic faith** to non-Catholic students respectfully and without seeking to usurp the faith of non-Catholic and non-Christian families.

Another form of partnership is one that exists in Religious Institutes, who since Vatican II with courage and patience, and in partnership with the Holy Spirit, have committed to and experienced a **comprehensive and unfolding growth** towards a more synodal approach. As one such group reflected,

"...we have experienced the evolution in our mode of governance and decision-making from hierarchical to something far more inclusive and participatory."

Members of Religious Institutes have **much to offer** the diocese and its people as they learn how to grow in communion and increase participation in the mission of the church.

Partnership between clergy, staff and parishioners leads **to co responsibility for decision-making** and enables creativity in liturgy for the community and is one of the most sought characteristics of a thriving parish.

At another level the partnerships built

among different faith communities ensures that faith education is supported by the State Government, allowing communities to teach their **faith to children in Government schools**, which do not offer education in any religion. Ecumenism is especially important to, and benefits from, this partnership enabling Easter and Christmas **celebrations** for Christian students at Government schools.

InterChurch Christmas Carol events and involvement in World Day of Prayer services are some of the rare examples of **ecumenical partnership outside schools**. One parish recently partnered with local Christian churches to provide meals and raise funds for charities supporting homeless people. It is hoped that this will become a new regular work of Christian **faith in action**.

One respondent recounted good practice in ecumenical relations within the Diocese that previously existed. We note the potential for renewing such good practice is a challenge that seems dependent on one passionate person who will **drive** such initiatives.

A recent interreligious dialogue, initiated by the CCCMR³ in the Diocese, invited comment from Muslim and Jewish people. The **Diocesan Interfaith Commission** is a welcome initiative.

We heard **obstacles to partnership** include lack of commitment in one or more parties, resistance to the reform that partnership might bring, lack of communication, and structures that do not facilitate the work of the partnership. The most common example of this is limited shared decision-making in parishes. Some parishioners feel their gifts and talents are overlooked. A few voices asked for Canon law reform to allow pastoral councils a deliberative vote.

³ Columban Centre for Christian Muslim Relations

Going out into the deep: a mission to welcome in and to go out together towards the Kingdom

In 2019, Bishop Vincent Long gave a mandate to the Diocese: *“Go out into the deep. Become the Church Christ calls us to be.”*

“We need to create a church that is more humble, transparent, accountable to the faithful and even to the community at large,” Bishop Vincent said. *“The time has come for the church to be truly the church of the baptised and together, with the ordained, all the people of God, all of us, can create that new culture that we long for – a culture of humility, accountability and service – which is at the heart of the Gospel.”*⁴

At the heart of the Church there is always the Gospel. At the heart of the Gospel is Jesus, who, in word and action, spoke of a loving God: *“always more expansive than we can imagine, always more merciful, always more inclusive, always more compassionate. Jesus came as teacher of God’s kingdom; he shone God’s Wisdom upon the situations of those who were poor, marginalised or broken in any way, and it revealed a God of uncompromising compassion.”*⁵ The Church we strive to become is a Church that makes this God “present and in a sense visible”⁶ to each other, to the communities in which we live, to our world and to creation.

Throughout this process of listening and discernment, we have tried to be attentive to the voice of the Spirit in discerning the next steps for our church, so our journeying forward serves this mission. With Bishop Long, we pray, *“may the Holy Spirit accompany us as we move boldly into the direction of the Kingdom. Let’s have the courage to launch ourselves into the deep.”*

And so...

The Church in Parramatta will continue its commitment to conversion and synodality.

In moving forward, the Church in Parramatta will continue in an ongoing way its commitment to conversion towards a more synodal church in the **spirit of Vatican II and the urging of Pope Francis**. Attentive to the Spirit guiding us towards greater synodality, we will endeavour to be mindful in language, our gatherings and actions to be attuned to being **hospitable** in our welcome to all, **especially those most on the margins**, such as the divorced, members of the LGBTQIA+, the Aboriginal communities, the refugee and asylum seekers, the abandoned, overlooked and those who feel estranged from the Church.

In a synodal Church solidarity and service to the poorest needs to be explicit. *“God beckons us in the people at the margins of society.”*⁷

We will **reach out pastorally** to walk together with those in our Church who are troubled by the Pope’s call to synodality.

⁴ Bishop Long, Address to Diocesan Forum, *Go out into the Deep*, 13 July 2019

⁵ To be published 2022.

⁶ Vatican Council II, “The Church in the Modern World,” para 21.

⁷ Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv. 14 April 2022

The Diocese makes a commitment to specific and immediate action arising from the synodal process.

We believe the Spirit is calling us to the following immediate clear actions:

1. **Purposefully develop the existing culture of synodality further** through:
 - a. Initiating a period of **intentional shared reflection** on what “being a synodal Church” **means** for the ordained and all those who hold, or who are aspiring to, positions of leadership in our diocesan Church and its ministries
 - b. Unearthing, analysing and addressing the **structural factors** which have led to the occurrences of abuse and its mismanagement
 - c. Drawing on the advice of experts and existing good practice, to develop a plan of action for the diocese and individual parishes, in response to the **trauma, hurt and alienation** occasioned by the Church in all forms, especially with respect to the sexual abuse of children
 - d. Attending to the **education and formation of all the faithful in adult spirituality** well-grounded in scripture, ecclesiology and theology as an ongoing priority.

2. **Purposefully and respectfully seek a deeper understanding of Aboriginal spirituality and culture** to:
 - a. Move **towards authentic reconciliation** with the Aboriginal communities of this region
 - b. **Walk with and learn from** local Elders and their communities.

3. **To support these actions through:**
 - a. Developing an implementation action plan, which draws upon good practice, such as expert advice, clear goals and timelines
 - b. Convening appropriate Diocesan and local forums to bring together insights and fruits of the Plenary Council and those insights yet to be born
 - c. Ongoing review and reporting on these actions to the people of the Church.

There are a number of concurrent activities and/or initiatives (ie Plenary Council in Australia) which will need to be considered in tandem as we continue this ongoing commitment to conversion and synodality.