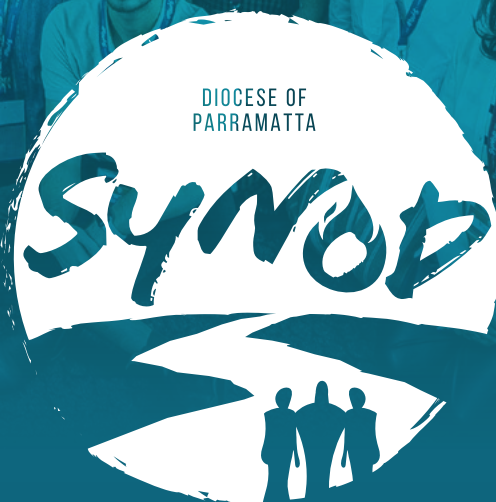


"Behold I am doing a new thing"
Isaiah 43:19



DIOCESAN SYNOD SUMMARY REPORT

DECEMBER 2023



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INTRODUCTION

Dear friends,

As we reflect on the Synod of the Diocese of Parramatta, it is with a sense of gratitude and hope that I hereby present the outcomes of the Diocesan Synod in this summary report.

The Diocesan Synod was a historic event that unfolded from October 13 to 15, 2023, representing a vital step in our journey as a synodal Church, one that echoes the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and the call of the Holy Spirit.

As the Body of Christ in the modern world, we recognise that our mission is not confined to the walls of our churches. Just as the Risen Lord instructed us to “go and make disciples of all nations,” we are summoned to transcend self-absorption and reach out to those who have yet to experience the message of Jesus and the Kingdom he established.

Our synodal journey began with extensive conversations, gathering insights and perspectives from diverse voices within our diocese. We express our profound gratitude to all who actively engaged in these discussions, representing parishes, schools, ministry and prayer groups, agencies, and individuals.

We move forward in this synodal pilgrimage with a sincere invocation to the Holy Spirit, seeking His guidance in the next stage of our journey. In the words of the Prayer for the Synod, we call on Him to give us the courage to pursue the mission with bold humility.

The reflections and discussions of our Diocesan Synod encompass an earnest response to the signs of the times and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and we are confident that the fruits of our collective discernment will enrich our diocesan community.

As we embark on this journey, we acknowledge the centrality of Christ and His presence as the guiding thread of our synodal efforts. His light shall illuminate our debates, and His wisdom shall direct our actions. Through the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, we trust that the Diocese of Parramatta will continue to be a source of renewal, transformation, and hope for all who seek the message of the Gospel.



MOST REVEREND VINCENT LONG VAN NGUYEN OFM CONV
Bishop of Parramatta





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The First Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Parramatta, held from October 13 to 15, 2023, marked a significant milestone in the Diocese's history.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the first Diocesan Synod, intending to summarise the preparatory stage leading up to the Synod assembly, and detail the proceedings of the assembly and its outcomes.

In January 2023, the Diocese of Parramatta embarked on a two-year journey to embrace synodality, aligning with Pope Francis's vision and led locally by Bishop Vincent for the Church in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. This initiative aimed to discern the Holy Spirit's guidance in revealing pastoral needs and deepening communion, participation, and mission within the Church.

The Synod's design and framework were informed by various sources, including Canon Law, instructions on Diocesan Synods, documents from previous Australian Diocesan Synods, and the Fifth Australian Plenary Council, with input from the Diocesan Canon Lawyer.

The listening phase of the Synod involved extensive community engagement, spanning from March to June, reaching out to parishes, schools, and agencies. Over 5000 individuals were engaged, resulting in more than 1000 submissions. Various methods were employed to achieve widespread engagement, including Deanery Listening Consultations, parish listening sessions, and broader strategies tailored to resonate with the local context and diverse groups. Additionally, a range of resources was developed to facilitate this inclusive listening process. These resources, catering to different demographic and linguistic needs, were designed for families, workplace teams, schools, youth groups, and parishes, ensuring broad and meaningful participation across the Diocese.

The submissions were synthesised by the Synod Writing Group, who reviewed all submissions and produced the Synod Working Document used as the foundation paper for reflection, discernment, discussion, and decision-making at the Synod assembly.

The Synod assembly comprised 195 members, including clergy, consecrated persons, and laypeople, as well as eight observers and four periti (experts). The Synod members, representing a diverse cross-section of the diocesan community, were selected through ex-officio roles, applications, and direct invitations. All members were active participants in the diocese and committed to its spiritual and communal growth.

The Synod was celebrated with a pre-assembly event on the eve of the Synod at the annual LIFTED Live! On The Forecourt event, and the official commencement was marked by an Opening Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral on Friday 13 October. The assembly process involved video reflections, spiritual conversations, and consultative voting on proposed resolutions across six themes: An Inclusive and Welcoming Church, A Humble and Healing Church, A Listening Church, A Church Renewed in Spirit and Prayer, and A Church That Reaches the Margins. Twenty-four resolutions passed, addressing inclusivity, healing, youth engagement, stewardship of the earth, and collaborative leadership.

The Diocesan Synod's emphasis on spiritual conversations and inclusivity fostered an environment of respectful dialogue, even amidst differing viewpoints. Observers and facilitators commended the Synod's transparency and the atmosphere of positive energy and community spirit.

In his concluding remarks, Bishop Vincent Long highlighted the Synod as a model for decision-making and urged continued commitment to synodality. The Synod concluded with a Closing Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral, where Bishop Long encouraged carrying the spirit of synodality into the future.

Overall, the Diocesan Synod was a testament to effective organisation, inclusivity, and the Church's commitment to deepening in communion, participation, and mission. The resolutions and insights gained from this synodal process lay a strong foundation for the development of a Diocesan pastoral plan, ensuring that it resonates with the diverse needs and aspirations of the community.

PREPARATORY PHASE OF THE SYNOD

PLANNING

In January 2023, the Diocese of Parramatta began a two-year process aimed at embracing synodality, as envisioned by Pope Francis, and championed by Bishop Vincent Long locally for the Church in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. The Synod also intended to give Bishop Vincent a sense of the pastoral needs and opportunities for revitalising communion, participation, and mission in the Diocese, identified by the People of God, through discernment with the Holy Spirit. The Synod outcomes would then provide the foundation for the development of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan.

In setting the foundations for our synodal journey, a Secretariat and Synod Preparatory Commission was established. Relevant sources for designing and framing the Diocese of Parramatta synodal journey were reviewed, namely Canon Law, the Instructions on Diocesan Synods, documents from previously held Diocesan Synods across Australia, the recent Fifth Australian Plenary Council, as well as advice from the Diocesan Canon Lawyer.

The Diocesan Synod posed the fundamental question: *In what ways can we respond to the call of the Holy Spirit to be a more synodal Church in the Diocese of Parramatta?*

Supplementary questions were developed to assist with engagement in the process. The key pillars of a synodal church provided the areas for discussion: communion, participation, and mission.

FORMATION & RESOURCES

To encourage participation in the synodal journey, it was important provide formation in synodality and listening. Beginning with Information Sessions via ZOOM, members of the Diocese were provided with core concepts in synodality and an outline of the intention for holding a Diocesan Synod.

Further formation was delivered through digital resources made available via the Diocesan Synod website. This included collating relevant documents from the Synod of Bishops on Synodality, videos and social media content on synodality, developing new resources to deepen understanding of spiritual conversations, and creating scripture reflections and tools that aided leaders in their planning of their local listening sessions.

LISTENING

The Listening Stage of the synodal journey included a Diocesan-wide invitation to engagement in the consultation process from March to June 2023. The framework for listening and dialogue towards submissions to the Diocesan Synod was informed by Spiritual Conversations, a practice rooted in Ignatian tradition and Jesuit spirituality.

The Listening Stage was intentionally designed to reach people from all walks of life, including those disengaged or alienated from the Church, aiming to reflect the diversity of people living, working, or serving within Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. Tailored resources were developed for diverse groups including families, workplace teams, schools, youth groups, and parishes, available in multiple languages. Five Deanery Listening Consultations were organised to encourage local listening. These were supported by the Deanery Pastoral Councils, providing an avenue for formation and leadership development. Listening sessions were also encouraged within local communities, including parishes, schools, agencies and chaplaincies.

Broader listening strategies were used to engage people in their realities and contexts. This included embedding listening in existing

Preparation Programs and Special Religious Education (SRE) in public schools. This approach not only garnered a wealth of submissions, but also provided formation on deep listening and openness to dialogue at all levels. As articulated by Sr Nathalie Becquart XMCJ, Under-Secretary for the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, “we learn by doing”.

SUBMISSIONS & SYNTHESIS

Submissions were collected in person and online. Over 1000 submissions were provided by groups and individuals across the Diocese. After the deadline, the submissions were collated for review by the Synod Writing Group. The group spent two months synthesising the submissions and discerning a framework to reflect the breadth and depth of stories, experiences, and reflections. With the guidance of Bishop Vincent, the Synod Working Document articulated six key themes for consideration at the Synod, including 3-5 proposed resolutions for each theme.

PARTICIPANTS OF THE SYNOD

The Synod assembly was comprised of 195 members, 8 observers and 4 *periti* (experts).

Members are the core participants of the Synod assembly, can speak from the floor and have consultative voting rights. Observers are individuals who attend, may wish to speak from the floor but do not have consultative voting rights, usually representing other diocese or Christian churches. Periti are experts and consultants who provide specialised knowledge and advice to the assembly, and do not have consultative voting rights.



DIOCESE of
PARRAMATTA

Mount Victoria

Richmond

Windsor

Riverstone

Katoomba

Penrith

Rooty Hill

Blacktown

Parramatta

MEMBERS

Synod members, once lawfully designated, have the right and obligation to participate in the sessions of the Synod, to 'offer assistance to the diocesan bishop for the good of the whole diocesan community' (Can. 460).

Appointments to the Synod membership were made by three distinct pathways: ex-officio, application and direct invitation.

"Ex officio" members of the Synod are those required to participate in accordance with Canon Law, and included Vicars General, Vicars Episcopal, Vicars Judicial, Members of the Council of Priests, Rectors of Major Seminaries, and Vicars Forane (Deans).

Applications to be a member of the Synod were made available to the people of God in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains, aiming to ensure that the Synod membership was a true reflection of the entire portion of the People of God within the Diocese. Following a process of recommendation by the Diocesan Pastoral Council, Bishop Vincent selected members and formally invited and appointed members of the Synod. Where the recommended candidates did not adequately represent the entire Diocesan community, direct invitations were extended to specific individuals to ensure the Synod truly reflected the entire portion of the People of God who constitute of the Diocese¹.

In addition, the clergy of each parish were invited to nominate one clergy from their parish to be a member of the Synod.

A Synod is a gathering of the Church, therefore, Synod Members must have been baptised Catholics or people who have begun the RCIA process towards baptism. Furthermore, Synod members were required to see themselves, and be recognised by others, as having:

- active involvement in a parish, agency or ministry group within the diocese
- a commitment to contributing to the diocese becoming more Christ-like
- a commitment to discern prayerfully with others what God wants for the whole diocese
- a striving to live the Gospel in their family, work, and community activities, i.e. being

loving, forgiving, hospitable, compassionate, supportive of the poor, inclusive of all

- a desire and ability to listen with an open mind and heart to, and weigh up, all that they hear especially within the parish or community they represent
- participated in a listening session or have made a submission to the Synod
- an ability to fulfill the requirements of Synod Membership.

Synod members were required to make an Oath of Fidelity (see Appendix A). During the Synod sessions, members were able to speak from the floor and had consultative voting rights.

OVERVIEW OF MEMBERSHIP

The Diocesan Synod membership consisted of 195 members (see Appendix B for full list).

All members belonged to different communities, parishes, schools, ministries, and agencies within our Diocese.

- Membership consisted of clergy (22%), consecrated persons (5%) and laypeople (73%)
- 63% were male and 37% were female – the higher proportion of males was largely due to the number of clergy required to be present (ex-officio, according to canon law)
- There was a reasonable distribution of ages, however the portion of members aged 18-25 was significantly low
- 44 of our 47 parishes were represented
- 69% of members were from our parishes
- 12% were employed in Catholic education in our Diocese
- Members included representatives from Maronite and Syro-Malabar churches in the diocese
- Various Catholic organisations, institutions, agencies and ministry groups operating within the Diocese were represented, including CatholicCare, Young Christian Workers (YCW), Holy Spirit Seminary, LGBTIQA+ Pastoral Ministry Support Group, migrant chaplaincies and the Australian Catholic University (ACU).

FORMATION

The majority of Synod members engaged in a listening consultation during the Listening Stage, which was instrumental in forming them for 'spiritual conversations' and the synodal process. To further form and prepare members to fully participate in the Synod, two primary initiatives were organised: an online induction and a reflection evening.

ONLINE INDUCTION

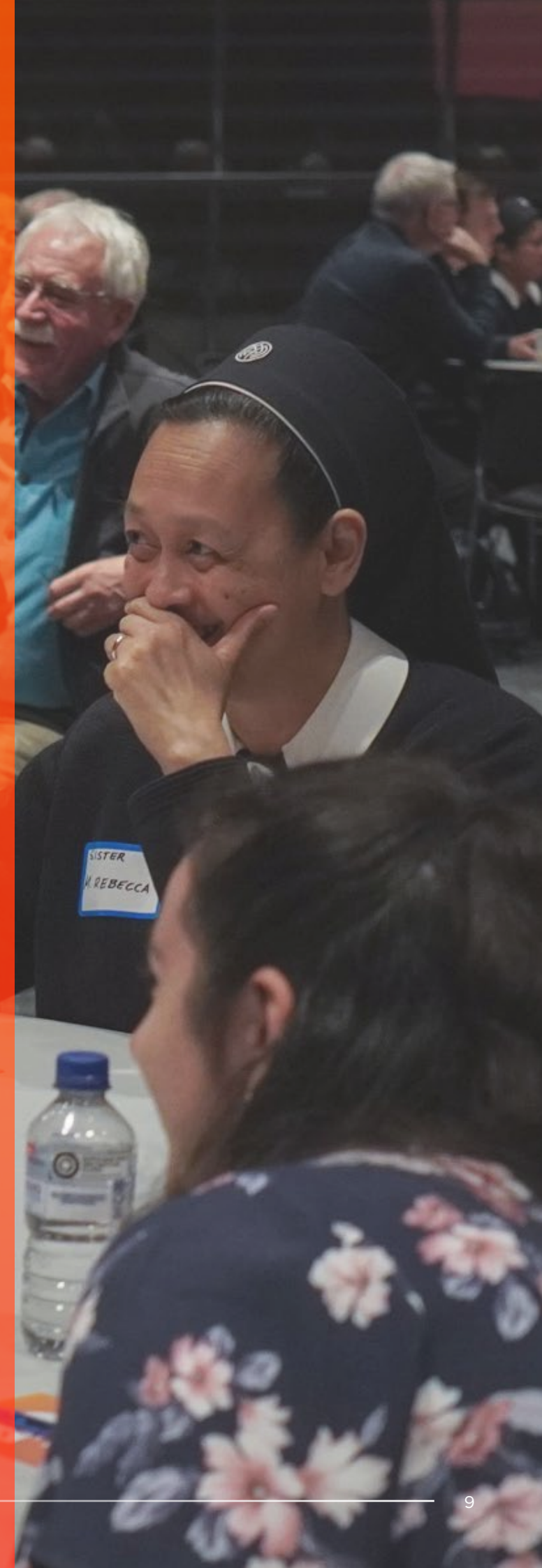
Synod Members, they were required to complete an online induction. Upon successful completion of the induction, members should have achieved the following learning outcomes:

- a fundamental understanding of 'Synodality' needed for participation at a Diocesan Synod
- an understanding of the purpose of a Synod, in particular, the purpose of the local Synod of the Diocese of Parramatta
- a deeper understanding of Spiritual Conversations
- an understanding of discernment within the context of Synodality
- an understanding of our Diocesan Synod processes and procedures, and expectations of members at the Diocesan Synod

REFLECTION EVENING

On Friday 22 September, Synod Members gathered in the Hub at St John XXIII Catholic College, Stanhope Gardens, for an evening of reflection and formation, led by Lead Facilitator, Qwayne Guevara, supported by the Mission Enhancement team of the Diocese of Parramatta Chancery. The goal of the evening was for members to build connections and deepen their understanding of the Synod and their role as a member.

During the event, Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv emphasised the importance of a shared mission and unity in diversity within a synodal Church, in line with Pope Francis's vision. The session gave members the opportunity to meet and share their unique stories, helping them prepare for the Synod assembly, where they will discuss themes drawn from the stories of the people of God in our Diocese.



OBSERVERS

The bishop, according to Canon 463 §3, is free to invite ministers or members of other Christian Churches or ecclesial communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church, who have a close connection to the diocese, to be Synod observers. They may wish to contribute to the discussions of Synod but have no consultative voting rights.

The observers appointed to our Diocesan Synod were:

- **Ms Elizabeth Stone**, General Secretary, National Council of Churches in Australia
- **Very Rev. Father Anastasios Bozikis**, President of NSW Ecumenical Council
- **Most Rev. Danny Meagher**, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Sydney
- **Most Rev. Terry Brady**, Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus, Archdiocese of Sydney (2007-22) (*not pictured*)
- **The Rt. Rev. Gary Koo**, Anglican Bishop of Western Sydney
- **Mr. Luke Tobin**, Mission Formation Educator, Catholic Mission
- **Mrs Patti Beattie**, Director of Evangelisation, Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay
- **Mr. Jason Oldridge**, Executive Director of Catholic Care

PERITI (EXPERTS)

A *peritus* (expert) plays a significant role throughout the Synod, providing the Presider with expert knowledge on the themes to be discussed, and where necessary, provide recommendations to enhance the facilitation of the Synod process. Periti do not possess any voting rights.

The periti appointed to our Diocesan Synod were:

- **Rev Dr Gerard Kelly**, Catholic Institute of Sydney
- **Sr Dr Michele Connolly rsj**, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies
- **Sr Dr Margaret Beirne RSC, DTh, Med, BD, MA, BA**, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies
- **Dr Rodger Austin**, JCD STL, Canon Lawyer

The periti were seated at the table with the Presider, Bishop Vincent Long, and the Chair of the Preparatory Commission, Sr Ailsa Mackinnon. Practically, they provided advice on the Synod process, especially in the circumstance where two resolutions proposed did not receive a majority vote.



FACILITATORS

The facilitators of our Diocesan Synod played a crucial role in the facilitation of the synodal sessions of the assembly. Facilitation involved guiding discussions, encouraging participation, managing time, and summarising outcomes. Their primary objective was to manage the synod's process and promote productive and respectful dialogue.



DR TRISH HINDMARSH
EDD, MTH, BA, BED

Trish is an educator who worked as a teacher, principal and senior Catholic educational leader in Catholic schools and systems across Australia for over fifty years, most recently as Director of Catholic Education in Tasmania. Since retirement she has continued to work pro bono in adult education, formation and leadership for Catholic Church renewal in several dioceses.

She is a founding member of Concerned Catholics Tasmania, an active parishioner at Star of the Sea Parish Burnie and a volunteer with Vinnies. Her most recent published work is 'Ecological Spirituality: Caring for our Common Home'.

She is married to Vin and has two adult children and one grandchild. Her interests are Church renewal and reform, gardening, reading, writing bush walking, and enjoying family.

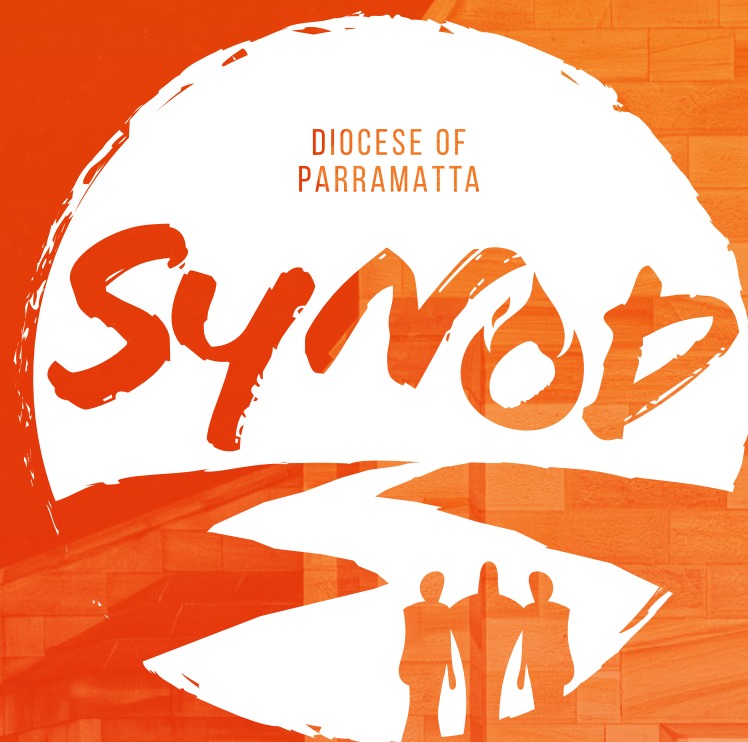


PROFESSOR BR DAVID HALL FMS
DMIN, MTH, GDIPED, BED

David, a Marist Brother, is the foundation Dean of the La Salle Academy at the Australian Catholic University (ACU). La Salle has responsibility for programs that the university offers in the areas of Educational Leadership and Governance, Faith Formation and Religious Education. He took up this position after thirty years in Catholic education, filling roles that included principal and Executive Director of the Marist Ministries Office.

David is a member of several school and diocesan boards and committees, including Chair of the Board for Marist Schools Australia. He teaches in post graduate programs at ACU and offers national and international workshops for Catholic educators. Formation for mission is his particular passion and expertise.

David was a facilitator at the recent Australian Plenary Council.



THE DIOCESAN SYNOD



WATCH THE FULL VIDEO SUMMARY²





PRE-ASSEMBLY: THURSDAY 12 OCTOBER

LIFTED LIVE! IN THE FORECOURT: BRIDGE TO THE SYNOD

The commencement of the first-ever Diocesan Synod was celebrated at the LIFTED Live! in the Forecourt event at St Patrick's Cathedral, on the eve of the Synod assembly. Catholics, including several young people, from Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains engaged in singing, dancing, prayer, and witness.

During the event, young participants expressed their aspirations for a cultural shift within the Church, encouraging open discussions and a more reflective, Spirit-guided approach. They emphasised the Synod as a broader process, inviting young people to understand its significance and actively participate.

LIFTED Live! in the Forecourt not only marked the beginning of the Synod but also provided a platform to showcase the talents of young individuals, including performances, art displays, and opportunities to explore faith through local Catholic businesses and networking groups.

 VIEW THE PHOTO ALBUM³

 WATCH THE VIDEO RECAP⁴



ASSEMBLY DAY 1: FRIDAY 13 OCTOBER



VIEW PHOTOS: OPENING MASS⁵



VIEW PHOTOS: DAY 1⁶



WATCH THE VIDEO RECAP⁷

OPENING MASS, COMMISSIONING AND WELCOME

The Diocesan Synod officially commenced on Friday 13 October, with the Opening Mass and Commissioning of Synod members, held at St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta. Synod members, their families and friends, and the wider Diocesan community were invited to attend, and the Mass was livestreamed for those unable to attend in person.

“The diocesan journey of synodality is a source of renewal and a platform for agency and creativity that enables greater communion, participation, and mission.”

- Bishop Vincent Long, Homily for the Opening Mass of the Diocesan Synod

During the Mass, Synod members took an Oath of Fidelity, as they extended their right hand toward the Book of the Gospels.

Following the conclusion of Mass, delegates were asked to assemble on the exterior steps of the Cathedral for a group photo. After the photo, each member received an electronic candle, lit up to mark the beginning of the Synod. With lit candles in hand, members ‘journeyed together’ as a group in a prayerful walk toward the Synod Hall at CommBank Stadium. This was led by Bishop Vincent Long. Upon arrival on CommBank Stadium grounds, a Welcome to Country Ceremony was performed by Uncle Graham.

Delegates then proceeded into the Synod Hall for a ‘Welcome’ segment, which included prayer, welcoming address from Bishop Vincent (see Appendix D), and an overview of the synod process. Members also had the opportunity to become acquainted with their table group, who they would journey with over the coming days.

ASSEMBLY DAY 2: SATURDAY 14 OCTOBER

On Day 2 of the Diocesan Synod, delegates started their day by having breakfast together, after which they assembled in the Synod Hall to begin a full day of sessions, focussing on four of the six themes of the Synod.

Throughout each thematic session, delegates reflected upon the contents of the Working Document, *'Becoming a more synodal Church in the Diocese of Parramatta'* and considered and voted on several proposed resolutions related to the theme.

Each thematic session followed a process, as outlined below:

1. Opening Video
2. Spiritual Conversations
3. Voices from the Floor
4. Free Discussion and Voting
5. Votes Counted and Result Announced



VIEW PHOTOS: DAY 2⁸



WATCH THE VIDEO RECAP⁹

OPENING VIDEO

As each session begun, a video package was presented for delegates to pray and reflect upon the theme to be unpacked. The video included an introduction to the theme and drew its content from the Synod Working Document, including selected voices of the People extracted from submissions, a Scripture reading, quotes from Popes, saints, or current leaders of our Church, and a reflection guide.

SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

Members were allocated time for discussions centred around the theme, facilitated through the framework of spiritual conversations (also known as 'conversations in the Spirit'). Each table of members had a moment for individual reflection for 60 seconds, immediately followed by each person taking turns to share their insightful perspectives in relation to the proposed question(s) for a period of 90 seconds. Between each person's time of sharing, a 30 second period of silence is observed for members to absorb and reflect upon what was shared. The timing of each period was signalled by a deep bell tone.

VOICES FROM THE FLOOR

Following two rounds of Spiritual Conversation, members were given the opportunity to address the entire assembly during a specific segment, referred to as "Voices from the Floor". This segment was designed to ensure all delegates had an equal opportunity to share their reflections on the theme and proposed resolutions. Between 10 to 15 Members were allowed to speak and each was allocated one minute to share.

FREE DISCUSSION & VOTING

Members were then given the opportunity to consider every resolution relating to the theme and to discuss their perspectives on the proposed resolutions at their respective tables prior to voting. The conversation was steered by the question *'In light of the theme and what you have heard, how could these resolutions deepen communion, participation, and mission in our Diocese?'* Members were provided with a voting booklet containing voting slips for each resolution. They were then asked to mark their position on each resolution by choosing either "yes" or "no".

VOTES COUNTED & RESULT ANNOUNCED

The voting booklets were collected and counted, undergoing a thorough process of verification through double counting, typically taking around 15 minutes on average. For the Synod to adopt a proposed resolution, it required a two-thirds majority of the votes cast, not including abstentions. The results of the consultative votes were then announced to the assembly by Sr Ailsa Mackinnon, Chair of the Synod Preparatory Commission.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES & REWORDED RESOLUTIONS

At the beginning of every session, members received two coloured sheets of paper: one blue and one yellow. The members were allotted time to fill in these sheets while votes were being counted. The blue sheet provided the opportunity for those who voted 'NO' to a resolution to recommend changes. It read 'I voted NO, in order to vote YES, I suggest the resolution is re-worded in the following way.' In cases where a resolution failed to pass, the Synod Writing Group was responsible for revising the resolution, incorporating suggestions from members who filled out the blue sheets. The yellow sheet was designed to encourage members to contribute ideas for implementing the resolution. It read 'I would like to suggest some implementation strategies for possible inclusion in the forthcoming Diocesan Pastoral.' The insights from these sheets would later aid the Bishop's office in devising implementation strategies for the resolutions that had been passed.

THEME 1

AN INCLUSIVE AND WELCOMING CHURCH

The theme ‘An Inclusive and Welcoming Church’ was a synthesis of submissions, which related to:

- Families
- Those who feel disconnected or alienated from church and faith
- The experience of those who identify as LGBTIQA+
- A desire for meaningful community
- Ideas for building welcome, inclusion, and community
- Building welcome, inclusion, and community via small groups
- Building community through participation and sharing of gifts
- Building community through a connection to culture



WATCH THE OPENING VIDEO¹⁰ >>>



VOICES FROM THE FLOOR

- The Member expressed that defining unconditional love involves understanding that it stems from the church’s inclusivity, emphasising self-love and acceptance. In the context of evolving family structures, the Member stressed the need to embrace diversity, including LGBTIQA+ communities, individuals with disabilities, those dealing with mental health issues, divorcees, and various other members. They pointed out that the Church’s priority is to be compassionate and non-judgmental, meeting people where they are in their journey of acceptance. The Member concluded by stating that ultimately, the church aims to serve as a bridge between earthly life and the spiritual realm of heaven.
- The Member, coming from a Jewish family, shared his unique journey of converting to Christianity, a process that took twenty years after his marriage. He emphasised how his parish community warmly welcomed him during this time. Having been baptised just 18 months ago, he described the experience as “truly wonderful”. He stated that it was reassuring to find a space where even those who initially feel like outsiders can eventually find acceptance and embrace the faith.
- As a young woman, the Member felt it was crucial to represent her demographic and emphasise the presence of young people and women in our church community. She felt disheartened that, over 2000 years, our church appears to have strayed from its Christ-centred nature. Christ embraced all individuals without exclusion, but she stated there was a prevailing mindset among some members that different people are regarded as foreign, evil, or deserving of hatred. As we engage in the synod process, the Member urged us to remember the true essence of Christ, who unconditionally loved, welcomed, and accepted everyone, regardless of their identity.
- The Member shared that grasping the concept of inclusivity within the church is a complex task for them. Raised with Christian values that discourage passing judgment on others, referencing John 3:16, which emphasises God’s love for all people and the potential for salvation through faith. This scripture reminds them of the significance of embracing each person as a child of God. Given the various opinions and complex issues, the Member expressed a desire for more direction from church leaders and Bishops to help steer through these challenges.
- The Member wanted to emphasise a notable gap in our understanding of marginalisation, particularly concerning women, the LGBTIQA+ community, and individuals who have experienced divorce. They pointed out that many of these individuals, living in proximity to our churches, often experience marginalisation and noted that a vast majority, about 80%, are not affiliated with the Catholic faith. Despite this, the Member sees a vital opportunity for our community to take action and make a positive impact.

Disclaimer: The views, information, or opinions expressed in the ‘Voices from the Floor’ are solely those of the individuals sharing during the assembly.

RESOLUTIONS

VOTED ON WERE:

		YES	NO
1A	To take active steps to build a culture of welcome, hospitality, and meaningful community across the Diocese.	182	9
1B	To create a safe and welcoming environment for all, especially the divorced, people with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and members of the LGBTIQA+ community.	142	50
1C	To intentionally seek out the gifts and talents of the members of our parishes to strengthen communion, participation, and mission.	182	10
1D	To prioritise resources that support parishes and ministry groups in our work with families in all their diverse structures and circumstances.	171	19

All proposed resolutions received a majority 'Yes' vote.

THEME 2

A HUMBLE AND HEALING CHURCH

The theme ‘A Humble and Healing Church’ was a synthesis of submissions, which related to:

- Acknowledging the harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples
- Desire to learn spiritual wisdom from the Aboriginal peoples
- Responding to the abuse of those in the Church’s care
- Acknowledging the need for healing for those who feel unwelcome in our churches
- Desire to adopt a simplicity of style in our church
- Desire to work as agents of healing and unity in our civic communities



WATCH THE OPENING VIDEO¹¹ >>>

11. <https://youtu.be/NC2HjVuxWCY>



VOICES FROM THE FLOOR

- The Member emphasised the need to recognise the underrepresentation of various groups, including Aboriginal people, single mothers, individuals facing illness, the elderly, victims of racism, and immigrants. They emphasised how crucial it is to take action by providing support, love, and friendship to those who have been hurt, regardless of the cause, based on personal encounters and experiences.
- The Member discussed the liturgy’s goal to provide a glimpse of the heavenly liturgy, where all members of the human family come together in worship and any cultural or national divisions are dissolved in unity with Christ. They raised concerns that having a Welcome to Country before the liturgy (Mass) may obscure the understanding that God is the ultimate owner of the land, and the purpose of the liturgy is to offer it back to Him. They emphasised their commitment to fostering healing and reconciliation with the Aboriginal community and exploring practical ways to achieve this.
- The Member shared that, while working in a community services role working with individuals from children’s homes who shared their experiences at the Royal Commission, led them to distance themselves from the Church and identify as an atheist for eight years, harbouring anger and hatred. They highlighted the need for clergy, leaders, and faithful Catholics to focus on the Church’s saints and the positive contributions the Church has made, along with the path forward, and that When we discuss healing, we should consider both baptised members and those who don’t attend church in our congregations.
- The Member recalled a Mass in 2012, where it was announced that the bishops had issued a heartfelt letter, extending their sincere apologies for the instances of sexual abuse committed within the Church. They had noted how deeply distressing the topic was, and that following the service, there was a noticeable silence amongst the congregation, indicating a collective realisation that action needed to be taken. Motivated by this, the Member, under the guidance of their priest, initiated a gathering with fellow educators to explore strategies for fostering open dialogue on sensitive matters. In this gathering, it was recognised that by adopting listening circles, they could create safe spaces for discourse, providing a platform for addressing shared experiences and conversations concerning subjects that are typically challenging to discuss.
- In contemplating the symbols and practices of the Aboriginal people, the Member shared the importance of recognising that many resolutions stem from a desire to inclusively involve others in our experiences. They emphasised that the Church, being universal, welcomes all individuals, and its practices are meant for everyone, both in the present and throughout history. They noted that this inclusivity is a continuous and timeless process, encompassing individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- They highlighted the successful models of communion, participation, and mission at Mt. Drutt, like the Aboriginal Catholic services and the Aboriginal Women’s Co-operative, as opportunities for the Diocese to engage the significant Aboriginal community in the region.

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RESOLUTIONS

VOTED ON WERE:

		YES	NO
2A	To continue to offer, its unreserved and deepest apologies to those who have been betrayed through sexual, other forms of abuse by clerical and lay representatives of the Church, and to further processes for safeguarding, healing, and support.	155	32
2B	That, given the high population of Indigenous people in our Diocese, we continue meaningful dialogue with local Aboriginal communities, to find opportunities to listen and share stories and learn from their wisdom and relationship with the land.	161	25
2C	To have signage or other appropriate symbols that offer recognition and reconciliation acknowledging the traditional owners of the land.	72	115
2D	That, parishes will help build united and harmonious civic communities by working collaboratively with like-minded organisations and individuals for the common good.	168	18

Resolutions 2A, 2B, and 2D received a majority ‘Yes’ vote, while Resolution 2C did not.

THEME 3

A LISTENING CHURCH

The theme 'A Listening Church' was a synthesis of submissions, which related to:

- Listening and encounter as our way of relating in the Church and beyond
- Listening for the quiet voices in our midst
- Listening to the voice of Creation
- Young people
- The spirit and contemporary society
- Education and formation in faith



WATCH THE OPENING VIDEO¹² >>>



VOICES FROM THE FLOOR

- The Member gave the opinion that by members of the parish working together - clergy, volunteers, and local organisations - a support system for homebound individuals could be established; by actively listening to their needs and collaborating, practical solutions could be developed to help them stay connected with their faith community.
- Sharing from their own experience of coming back to the faith, the Member expressed that in the 18-24 age group, many young people seek meaning and answers in a complex world. When they turn to the church, they're not looking for mere entertainment but for thought-provoking content that engages their intellect. The goal is to communicate the gospel truth faithfully but using the channels young people already use. The focus should be on delivering the truth in a way that resonates with them.
- The Member recalled that in the Gospel, Jesus asked questions people had never considered before, that opened up their sense of possibility. They questioned how, in our overstimulated world, to get 30 young individuals to ask transformative questions that challenge thinking and shake people out of complacency, making them reflect on existence, purpose, and vision for the world they want to live in. The Member desires for a Church that fearlessly asks questions and truly listens to the insights and responses from our communities.
- The Member emphasised the importance of listening to the cry of the Earth. As a resident of the Blue Mountains, they expressed gratitude living amongst the beauty of nature, but has also seen the impact of fires, and the impact it has on their young family. They believe that the Church in Parramatta has a tremendous opportunity to offer real hope for the next generation in the area by taking concrete actions to address climate change and make responsible choices regarding resource usage.
- The Member attended World Youth Day as a Group Leader and shared that from their experience, youth ministry works through giving young people an authentic encounter with Christ, and where it doesn't work is when youth are introduced to faith through tradition and liturgy - something that seems distant to them. What holds young people is creating a space to listen and truly encounter. It is what worked for the Member as they were coming into the Church and being formed, and it's what they seen work for others, especially from their World Youth Day experience.

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RESOLUTIONS

VOTED ON WERE:

		YES	NO
3A	To prioritise the allocation of resources towards sustaining existing youth ministries and co- creating new forms of engagement with young people within parishes, schools and beyond.	170	15
3B	To commit to working collaboratively with other faith-based and civic organisations at local levels to promote care for the earth and more sustainable stewardship of our common home across every parish, school, and agency, especially by joining the Laudato Si’ Action platforms.	152	34
3C	To promote the rich and faith-filled multicultural diversity within the Diocese and explore ways to integrate cultural traditions in our parish ministries, while respecting our theological and liturgical principles.	165	20

All resolutions received a majority ‘Yes’ vote.

THEME 4

A CHURCH RENEWED IN SPIRIT AND PRAYER

The theme ‘A Church Renewed in Spirit and Prayer’ was a synthesis of submissions, which related to:

- **Revitalised and participatory liturgies that reflect the local population**
- **Importance of liturgical formation for all**
- **Homilies that are biblically based, informed by contemporary theology,**
- **Relevant to people’s lives and directed to a particular audience**
- **Need for a variety of prayer experiences that strengthen the individual faith and discipleship of each person and are an entry point for those who are not initiated or fully engaged**
- **Decision-making at parish, agency and diocesan level that is grounded in prayerful conversation and discernment**
- **Growing in faith, spirituality, prayer**

 WATCH THE OPENING VIDEO¹³ >>>



VOICES FROM THE FLOOR

- The Member expressed that while the ‘Joy of the Gospel’ was a central theme in discussions, they admitted to not always experiencing this joy. Instead, they observe a barrier to spreading it and shared the need for the Church to emphasise the joy of the Gospel - that God became man, and died so that we could live - in every aspect of church life, including welcoming people to church and in homilies.
- The Member raised concerns about the adaptation of music for young people, expressing worry that, in the process, an appreciation for traditions might be lost. They posed the question, “What is our Catholic faith without traditions?” The Member noted that Vatican II also promotes sacred music and Gregorian chants and suggested that sacred music should not be limited to the Cathedral, but should also be present in parishes. The Member proposed that the Diocese should work with parishes to encourage participation in music liturgy, support musicians in music formation, and elevate the quality of music during Mass.
- The Member, with around 30 years of experience in liturgical formation, noted that when Vatican II was initially implemented, there was a strong focus on developing rubrics, rules, and do’s and don’ts. However, now the Member sees a need for students to understand “why we do what we do” in liturgy. They expressed the belief that many communities have not fully embraced what the Second Vatican Council called for, and that many are still stuck in a pre-Vatican II notion of what liturgy should be.
- The Member recounted the biblical story of the Lord being found in silence, not in the earthquake or fire, and emphasised the value of sitting in silence in the presence of God. They affirmed that it’s acceptable to have moments of silence. The Member also noted that while music can enhance prayer when done well, it can also be distracting, and there’s no need for constant noise. In today’s busy life, there seems to be little time for pause, but silence is okay. Regarding Resolution 4E, the Member stressed the importance of hearing from people and sharing but suggested that Mass may not be the ideal place for this.
- The Member clarified that “tradition” is not the same as “traditionalism” and emphasised that the Catholic tradition has evolved since the early Christian community. Highlighting that tradition is an ever-evolving concept, the member called for an openness and generosity of heart in accepting various forms of prayer and liturgy. The Member asked if people could embrace the “radical hospitality” that Christ exemplifies.

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RESOLUTIONS

VOTED ON WERE:

		YES	NO
4A	To strengthen adult faith formation through regionally focused programs that draw on Biblical studies, rich and diverse Catholic spiritual traditions, Church history, liturgy, theology and Catholic social teaching.	188	3
4B	To continue preparing and commissioning women and men in various liturgical ministries including lectors and acolytes. (<i>Spiritus Domini 2021</i>)	163	28
4C	To enhance the experience of liturgy through resourcing and preparing those involved in the celebration of the Mass that inspires communion, participation and mission.	182	8
4D	To re-affirm the importance and impact of the homily on our daily lives and explore synodal ways of enhancing its relevance to all.	163	27
4E	To provide avenues for members of the faithful with opportunities to share their reflections at the appropriate time during the liturgy.	62	127

Resolutions 4A, 4B, 4C and 4D received a majority ‘Yes’ vote, while Resolution 4E did not.

ASSEMBLY DAY 3: SUNDAY 15 OCTOBER

On the final day of the Diocesan Synod, delegates continued to explore the last two of the six themes of the Synod across two sessions.

THEME 5

A CHURCH THAT REACHES TO THE MARGINS

The theme 'A Church That Reaches to The Margins' was a synthesis of submissions, which related to:

- Following the example of Jesus
- The style of "how" we go on mission
- Preferential option for the poor and marginalised
- The interconnection of parish and school reaching out

 WATCH THE OPENING VIDEO¹⁴ >>>



VOICES FROM THE FLOOR

- The Member recalled attending a conference presenting 'Basic Ecclesial Communities' in the 90's and their approach wasn't about selling a uniform solution, jokingly using the term "Kentucky Fried Christianity." Instead, they shared personal experiences and effective structures. The key was to tailor approaches to fit the unique needs of each parish within its social and economic context, starting with a simple 'hello'. In Adelaide, Archbishop Faulkner's initiative involved families reaching out to non-active baptised Catholics, forming groups not officially termed 'basic communities' but serving as practical outreach efforts. This demonstrated the importance of proactive, community-oriented action, because "people won't come to us."
- A Member shared their surprise at witnessing the extent of homelessness around Parramatta after starting a new job in the area. They noted an increasing presence of homelessness within the diocese, a fact also observed by their daughter who witnessed this around her workplace at McDonald's. The member raised concerns about the general response to this issue, emphasising the need for basic facilities like hot showers, clean clothes, and meal preparation areas to uphold the dignity of these people. They expressed dismay over the widespread indifference towards the homeless and urged all to translate their faith into tangible action.
- The member shared their personal journey, having spent 14 years in a refugee camp before immigrating to Australia. Now, they oversee the Refugees and Asylum Seeker program and expressed appreciation for the significant progress made in the Diocese thanks to the support of the Bishop. They affirmed to the assembly the reality and importance of refugee and asylum seeker issues, citing their own experience as evidence. They thanked our parishes and schools, who are doing great work through food drives and the refugee sponsorship program. They encouraged us that we're not going backward with this issue but going forward. They encouraged the assembly to pass the resolution (5B) to ensure we continue with this great work.
- The Member highlighted the church's effectiveness in addressing visible suffering, like homelessness and illness, but pointed out its shortcomings in responding to invisible issues such as mental illness and domestic violence. They mentioned that in the diocese, several local government areas have high rates of domestic violence, and if statistics are anything to go by, it means there are people within parishes who've been abused, and people in parishes who are abusers. The member recounted assisting a woman in escaping an abusive relationship with a man who, despite being active in church and respected by the community, was abusive in private. This led to the question of how the church can not only recognise but also prevent such invisible suffering.
- The Member started by saying they were quite happy to sit quietly but the Spirit just wouldn't leave them alone, compelling them to share from the floor. They shared about the impact of the story about the 92-year-old woman heard from the submissions. They reflected on the feeling of being overwhelmed by the multitude of issues in the world and the uncertainty of where to start addressing them. Highlighting the parish bulletin that lists names of the sick, the member suggested adding personal stories to these names. They encouraged everyone to show curiosity and care towards these individuals, asking if they need assistance like a meal, phone call, or transportation to and from the hospital. The member emphasised the importance of making small differences in the face of overwhelming challenges.

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RESOLUTIONS

VOTED ON WERE:

		YES	NO
5A	To strengthen our commitment to respect and protect the dignity of human life, from conception through to old age and natural death.	173	3
5B	To strengthen our commitment to welcome, support and advocate on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers and work together in partnership with current and new agencies.	171	5
5C	That each of our local communities will take steps to reach out and identify the greatest needs of their people and prioritise and allocate resourcing to address those needs.	174	2
5D	To engage experts in research, social sciences and organisational best practice in exploring emerging models of pastoral care, leadership and ministry.	146	30

All resolutions received a majority 'Yes' vote.

THEME 6

A CHURCH WALKING TOGETHER

The theme ‘A Church Walking Together’ was a synthesis of submissions, which related to:

- Leadership
- Governance
- Walking in Partnership

 WATCH THE OPENING VIDEO¹⁵ >>>



VOICES FROM THE FLOOR

- The Member stressed the importance of leadership in parishes, combining creative clergy and the co-responsibility of parishioners in proactive partnerships. They asked several questions about transitioning to a synodal leadership style, preparing seminarians for such roles, evolving parish mentoring programs, clergy commitment to development, openness to reevaluating parish models, and more collaborative Church operations.
- The Member highlighted the often-overlooked church secretaries and parish pastoral councillors, and noted their multifaceted roles, “wearing many hats” and faith-driven motivation, despite being overworked and underpaid, with many workers being women. They proposed re-evaluating compensation and working conditions, especially for these roles, advocating for just and fair wages, and a fair enterprise agreement, in line with Catholic social teaching and embodying the principle of “walking together.”
- The Member spoke about the positive experiences of young priests who enjoy ministering to the children in schools, and suggested that we should empower priests to focus on aspects of ministry they are passionate about and enable them to be the face of Christ in their communities, potentially creating a team to support them in other areas. They emphasised the importance of appointing suitable individuals for these roles and promoting inclusivity, recognising both men and women can contribute effectively.
- A 24-year-old teacher and parishioner shared their transformed prayer life and church engagement post-World Youth Day. They criticised the poor relationship between the Church and schools, advocating for stronger collaboration and citing positive examples like their Principal, as sources of inspiration for this collaborative effort and encouraged others to see the potential in such relationships.
- The Member, with almost ten years of experience in youth ministry, questions why it falls upon 19 or 20-year-old volunteer youth ministers to foster the relationship between parishes and schools. They emphasise the importance of making schools a place where the joy of the gospel is lived out and call for efforts to form teachers to lead a Christ-centred life within schools.
- The Member noted a gap in priests’ and seminarians’ training, particularly in practical areas like human interaction and business skills. They highlighted the unrealistic expectations placed on priests and the need for true co-responsibility, beyond clericalism, for effective parish relations.
- Focusing on the Deanery Pastoral Council, the Member emphasised the need for commitment from council members and support from priests, hoping for greater involvement from the diocese community.
- A Member felt marginalised in the church due to their love for tradition, countering suggestions that those interested in tradition are to be feared. They called for inclusivity in the Synod, advocating for a Church where everyone, including those with a love for tradition, feels they belong.
- The Member emphasised the importance of engaging with other faith traditions, both Christian and non-Christian, without fear. They recounted their experience with interfaith dialogue, describing it as an “adventure in grace and deep friendship.” The core of their message was to treat all human beings with respect, listen to them, and love them, reflecting the gospel message of loving one another.
- The Member underlined the value of engaging with other faiths, sharing their positive experiences with interfaith dialogue. They recounted their experience, describing it as an “adventure in grace and deep friendship.” They emphasised treating everyone with respect and love, in line with the gospel’s message.

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RESOLUTIONS

VOTED ON WERE:

		YES	NO
6A	To provide ongoing formation that enhances a culture of synodality for those preparing for ordination, clergy and all others in leadership roles in parishes, agencies, ministries and councils.	173	10
6B	To engage experts in ecclesiology for facilitating discussion on models of parish and faith community to better respond to contemporary pastoral care, leadership, and ministry issues.	168	18
6C	To provide women with opportunities for mission, formation and education in a variety of leadership roles in the Church, supported by appropriate resources.	155	30
6D	To institute, where absent, a pastoral council at the diocesan, deanery and parish level (including ethnic chaplaincy), as a principal form of collaboration, dialogue and discernment (<i>Christifideles Laici</i> #25) in accordance with the law of the Church.	172	13
6E	To continue to promote interfaith and ecumenical dialogue and shared endeavours among our parishes, schools, agencies and ministries.	154	28

All resolutions received a majority ‘Yes’ vote.

ASSEMBLY DAY 3: SUNDAY 15 OCTOBER

REVIEW OF RESOLUTIONS

On the final day of the Diocesan Synod, following the exploration of six themes and the voting on resolutions, the Assembly undertook a review of the resolutions that failed to receive a two-thirds majority vote for approval.

In a consultation with Bishop Vincent Long, the Periti, Sr Ailsa Mackinnon and Qwayne Guevara, it was determined that Resolution 2C required rewriting and revisiting during the 'Review of Resolutions' session on the Synod's final day. This basis for this decision was influenced by the significant number of 'reworded resolution' blue sheets received in relation to the resolution, reflecting the sentiments of Synod members who voted 'NO' but indicated a willingness to vote 'YES' if the resolution were rephrased.

Resolution 4E also felt short of achieving a two-thirds majority in the initial vote. However, it was decided that this resolution would not be revisited, as the input from the Members did not offer sufficient clarity or direction for a suitable revised resolution. Furthermore, It was noted that a similar resolution was passed at the Fifth Australian Plenary Council and has been submitted to the Vatican for consideration.

The revised resolution, now termed 'Resolution 2C Revised', was displayed on the screens for the assembly to review: **"In the service of reconciliation, Parishes and Diocesan agencies discern appropriate ways of acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land"**. Members engaged in free table discussion about the revised resolution before proceeding to a vote. Each member was provided with a single voting ticket, with a reminder to honestly declare if they possessed more than one. Members were also invited to complete a yellow form for additional input on the resolution's implementation.

After a fastidious process of counting, the results of the vote were announced by Sr Ailsa Mackinnon. Resolution 2C Revised received a two-thirds majority vote, with 121 votes for 'YES' and 60 for 'NO'.

FINAL REMARKS

In a session of Final Remarks, Facilitator Br David Hall provided a summary of the Diocesan Synod assembly, along with further insights into the Synod and the broader concept of synodality within the context of the Church today.

Three of the eight observers of the Synod were then invited to come on stage and express their feedback and comments, on behalf of the entire group of observers.

Remarks from the Observers

Three observers, Ms. Elizabeth Stone from the National Council of Churches, Mrs. Pattie Beattie from the Broken Bay Diocese, and Mr. Luke Tobin from Catholic Mission offered insightful reflections on the Synod. They expressed that the Synod was a personally enriching experience, noting that it provided a welcoming and safe space, and that, despite the anticipated tensions, there prevailed a fundamental atmosphere of respect, inclusive dialogue, and authentic engagement.

The observers commended the Synod's transparency, emphasising the importance of silence in enhancing listening and speaking. They expressed gratitude for the meticulous planning, acknowledging the presence of the Holy Spirit and the formation of new bonds of friendship. They emphasised the power of authentic dialogue amidst opposing views, encouraging openness to explore new paths and align with God's vision. The observers urged Synod Members to carry the practice of spiritual conversations into their interactions, fostering a commitment to being Synodal.

Remarks from the Facilitators

Both Facilitators of the Synod, Br David Hall and Dr Trish Hindmarsh, gave their final remarks, conveying their gratitude for the invitation to facilitate, extended by Bishop Vincent.

Br David Hall acknowledged the value of trust in fostering a sense of wonder and hope at events like the Synod, emphasizing its fundamental role in the world. Dr. Trish Hindmarsh highlighted the prevalent kindness demonstrated throughout the Synod, quoting Cardinal Newman, "kindness is one of the most important signs of the presence of God". She also commended the Members for their love and goodwill, stating that their example should be replicated nationwide to help the Church progress towards a more Synodal Church.

Remarks from Bishop Vincent Long

Bishop Vincent expressed his privilege in presiding over the Diocese's first Synod and noted the presence of the Holy Spirit in the palpable kindness and positive energy among participants, even during challenging discussions; the deepened sense of community fostered not only during working sessions but also in informal moments; and the shared efforts and impressive organisation behind the scenes, elevating the Synod's quality. He thanked members for their contributions, emphasizing the important of learning from one another and putting aside personal preference for the greater good. Bishop Vincent positioned the Synod as a model for decision-making and urged members to promote synodality. In conclusion, Bishop Vincent expressed his gratitude for the spirit participants brought to the Synod and their roles in the process, saying that this marks the end of one phase of the journey, and he urged commitment to the next phase.

Concluding Remarks from Qwayne Guevara, Lead Facilitator - Diocesan Synod

Br. David Hall, the Facilitator, acknowledged the significant role played by Lead Facilitator, Qwayne Guevara, in the design and implementation of the Synod, and invited her on stage to conclude the final remarks.

As she begun her final remarks, Qwayne shared that synodality begins with reconciliation from within, emphasising the deep desire in every person to be "seen, heard, loved, and held".

She highlighted the extensive documentation throughout the Synod, including videos that Members can share, and announced that a report will be compiled on the Synod, supporting Members in sharing their experience.

Qwayne announced that in the coming months, Bishop Vincent will officially launch decrees and resolutions that will form the basis for the Diocese's new pastoral plan. She expressed gratitude to various parties involved, including CommBank, Catholic Schools, Community Ventures (Ambrose), Observers, Periti, Synod Writing Group, Preparatory Commission, Facilitators, the Synod planning team, Diocesan Communications team, Chancery team, photographers, videographers, Secretariat of the Synod, Bishop Vincent, Curia, Synod Members, and their loved ones and communities who supported their participation.

Her speech was met with a standing ovation from the room.



CLOSING MASS

After the final remarks, members proceeded to the central church of our diocese, St Patrick's Cathedral, for the Closing Mass. Bishop Vincent Long presided as the Principal Celebrant, assisted by priests and deacons from the Diocese.

In his homily (see Appendix F)h, Bishop Vincent Long acknowledged the uniqueness of the synod, the first for the Diocese and the first local Synod after the Fifth Plenary Council in Australia. He described the Synod as a transformative experience, akin to the disciples' unity in the Upper Room, where despite differences, a common faith, baptism, and commitment to the Lord prevailed.

As the Diocesan Synod concluded, Bishop Long urged the faithful to carry the spirit of synodality into the future — a continuous journey of communion, participation, and mission rooted in discipleship. Bisho Long characterised the Diocesan Synod served as a launching pad for the diocese to embody a new way of being Church, dedicated to proclaiming God's Kingdom and fostering renewal for generations to come.

 VIEW PHOTOS: CLOSING MASS¹⁶

 VIEW PHOTOS: DAY 3¹⁷

 WATCH THE VIDEO RECAP¹⁸

OUTCOMES

For a proposed resolution to be adopted by the Synod, it required a two-thirds majority of the votes cast, excluding abstentions.

24 resolutions received the required two-thirds majority, and were, therefore, adopted.

The resolutions adopted by the Diocesan Synod were:

Theme 1: An Inclusive and Welcoming Church

1A. To take active steps to build a culture of welcome, hospitality, and meaningful community across the Diocese.

1B. To create a safe and welcoming environment for all, especially the divorced, people with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and members of the LGBTIQA+ community.

1C. To intentionally seek out the gifts and talents of the members of our parishes to strengthen communion, participation, and mission.

1D. To prioritise resources that support parishes and ministry groups in our work with families in all their diverse structures and circumstances.

Theme 2: A Humble and Healing Church

2A. To continue to offer, its unreserved and deepest apologies to those who have been betrayed through sexual, other forms of abuse by clerical and lay representatives of the Church, and to further processes for safeguarding, healing, and support.

2B. That, given the high population of Indigenous people in our Diocese, we continue meaningful dialogue with local Aboriginal communities, to find opportunities to listen and share stories and learn from their wisdom and relationship with the land.

2C Revised. That, in the service of reconciliation, parishes and diocesan agencies discern appropriate ways of acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land.

2D. That, parishes will help build united and harmonious civic communities by working collaboratively with like-minded organisations and individuals for the common good.

Theme 3: A Listening Church

3A. To prioritise the allocation of resources towards sustaining existing youth ministries and co-creating new forms of engagement with young people within parishes, schools and beyond.

3B. To commit to working collaboratively with other faith-based and civic organisations at local levels to promote care for the earth and more sustainable stewardship of our common home across every parish, school, and agency, especially by joining the Laudato Si' Action platforms.

3C. To promote the rich and faith-filled multicultural diversity within the Diocese and explore ways to integrate cultural traditions in our parish ministries, while respecting our theological and liturgical principles.

Theme 4: A Church Renewed in Spirit and Prayer

4A. To strengthen adult faith formation through regionally focused programs that draw on Biblical studies, rich and diverse Catholic spiritual traditions, Church history, liturgy, theology and Catholic social teaching.

4B. To continue preparing and commissioning women and men in various liturgical ministries including lectors and acolytes. (Spiritus Domini 2021)

4C. To enhance the experience of liturgy through resourcing and preparing those involved in the celebration of the Mass that inspires communion, participation and mission.

4D. To re-affirm the importance and impact of the homily on our daily lives and explore synodal ways of enhancing its relevance to all.

Theme 5: A Church That Reaches the Margins

5A. To strengthen our commitment to respect and protect the dignity of human life, from conception through to old age and natural death.

5B. To strengthen our commitment to welcome, support and advocate on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers and work together in partnership with current and new agencies

5C. That each of our local communities will take steps to reach out and identify the greatest needs of their people and prioritise and allocate resourcing to address those needs.

5D. To engage experts in research, social sciences and organisational best practice in exploring emerging models of pastoral care, leadership and ministry.

Theme 6: A Church Walking Together

6A. To provide ongoing formation that enhances a culture of synodality for those preparing for ordination, clergy and all others in leadership roles in parishes, agencies, ministries and councils.

6B. To engage experts in ecclesiology for facilitating discussion on models of parish and faith community to better respond to contemporary pastoral care, leadership and ministry issues.

6C. To provide women with opportunities for mission, formation and education in a variety of leadership roles in the Church, supported by appropriate resources.

6D. To institute, where absent, a pastoral council at the diocesan, deanery and parish level (including ethnic chaplaincy), as a principal form of collaboration, dialogue and discernment (*Christifideles Laici #25*) in accordance with the law of the Church.

6E. To continue to promote interfaith and ecumenical dialogue and shared endeavours among our parishes, schools, agencies and ministries.

(For a full table of results, see Appendix E)

The resolutions adopted by the Synod are formed into Decrees and Declarations, at the discernment of the Bishop. The only legislator in a diocesan synod is the diocesan bishop; the other members of the synod possess only a consultative vote. Only he signs the synodal declarations and decrees, which can be published by his authority alone (Can. 466).

The adopted resolutions the foundation for the development of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan.

FEEDBACK

ONLINE SURVEY

An online survey was distributed to all Synod members after the conclusion of the assembly. The survey was anonymous and had a 5-minute completion time. 129 of 196 members responded (66% response rate),

The feedback received from participants provides valuable insights into the overall experience of the event.

Overall Rating

4.4 ★
average rating
out of 5

Welcoming & Safe Space

The welcoming atmosphere was positively noted, with 98.45% of respondents feeling welcome

97.67% affirmed they felt safe to share their experiences and stories

Most Liked Aspects

1. Getting to know people from across the Diocese
2. Small group discussions
3. Being challenged by other peoples' stories and experiences

Meaningful or Purposeful

A significant majority found the Synod meaningful or purposeful with 86.05% rating it as 'A great deal' or 'a lot' meaningful.

Understanding Synodality

The event succeeded in deepening the understanding of synodality for many, as 86% of respondents said it deepened their understanding "a great deal" or "a lot".

Venue

4.6 ★
average rating
out of 5

Catering

4.8 ★
average rating
out of 5

Chapel & Services

- Only 30.23% visited the Chapel, suggesting either a lack of interest or awareness.
- Utilisation of the counselling service was low, with only 3.88% having used it, which might indicate that most attendees felt no need for additional support in this area. A few comments commended the offering of the service.
- Childcare services were almost unused, with only 1.55% using them. However, those that did utilise the service strongly expressed gratitude for the service being offered.

Content, Facilitation & Discussion

- Content-related material was highly rated, with 82.17% rating it as excellent.
- The facilitators also received high praise, with 75.97% rating their performance as excellent. This indicates a well-received structure and execution of discussions.
- The majority felt that the timing for the table discussions was perfect (72.87%), indicating that the event was well-paced.

Attendees of the Synod Assembly brought forward an array of feedback, rich with commendations for the event's organisation and the establishment of an environment with a spirit of openness and safety that allowed for honest discussions. They valued the opportunity for meaningful dialogue and the chance to engage with fellow members of the Diocese of Parramatta.

The majority of respondents reported feeling secure in sharing their experiences, expressed that they found the event meaningful, and showed appreciation for the venue, catering, content, and facilitators.

While the event was overwhelmingly successful, there were constructive critiques aiming to refine certain aspects. Some responses suggested that the resolutions presented were perceived as somewhat vague and called for greater clarity and stronger connections to feedback and the challenges experienced by the Church. Additionally, the voting process drew attention, with concerns about privacy due to the optional blue and yellow voting forms, with blue representing a 'no' vote and yellow a 'yes'.

Despite these areas noted for potential enhancement, the overall data portrays a highly successful Synod Assembly.

REFLECTIONS FROM MEMBERS

"I must confess that I attended our first synod with my own agenda ... However, notions of working to advance a vision of the church according to myself were quickly dispelled when delegates were informed that a Synod is not a parliament. While resolutions would be discussed and delegates would vote, our Synod was first and foremost about listening to the movement of the Holy Spirit. At this instruction I was forced to take on the difficult task of setting aside my own agenda and instead opening myself to hearing the voice of the Spirit." - Male, 26-35

"This Synod was a transformative experience that will forever hold a special place in my heart. It emphasised the power of community, prayer, and discernment in our faith journey. It was a celebration of our shared purpose and a commitment to living out our faith in tangible ways." - Female, 36-45

"The contrast between a process that was highly political and one where we aimed for the Holy Spirit to be the prime motivator and animator was significant. The message for me was that we humans are more effective, more inclusive, more conciliatory when we are big enough to seek guidance from God to help us and when we seek to hear the voice of God through other people, even if their views differ from our own." - Deacon

CONCLUSION

The Diocesan Synod has been a profound journey for all involved, marked by a spirit of discernment and communal reflection. The voices of the faithful have resonated within the hallowed spaces of our gathering, each sharing their vision for the Church’s path forward.

The feedback provided by the attendees has been a testament to the vibrant faith and the earnest desire within our community to seek a more engaged and responsive Church. While there have been some concerns, notably regarding the need for clearer resolutions and a more confidential voting process, such insights are invaluable. They highlight the depth of care our community holds for the integrity and direction of our Church.

The commendations for the event’s organisation and the quality of discussions have been heartening. They affirm our commitment to fostering an environment where every voice can be heard and where every heart can freely open in dialogue and trust.

As we step forth from this Synod, carrying with us the rich tapestry of experiences shared and lessons learned, let us hold onto the constructive feedback and the positive affirmations alike. Both will guide us as we endeavour to embody the true spirit of synodality in our actions and our ministries.

The journey does not end here. It is the seedbed for a continued transformation, as we collectively respond to the call to a deeper discipleship and a more profound communion with each other and with Christ. Let us proceed with the knowledge that our shared efforts are the very essence of the Church living and breathing in the world today.

May the Holy Spirit continue to guide us as we take the next steps in our synodal journey, ever faithful to the mission entrusted to us. The path ahead is bright with the promise of God’s grace, and together, we will walk it with courage and faith.

SR AILSA MACKINNON RSM AM
Chair of the Synod Preparatory Commission
Chancellor (Ministries)
Member of the Curia



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A OATH OF FIDELITY



OATH OF FIDELITY ON ASSUMING AN OFFICE TO BE EXERCISED IN THE NAME OF THE CHURCH

I, _____ in assuming the office of Synod Member promise that in my words and in my actions I shall always preserve communion with the Catholic Church.

With great care and fidelity I shall carry out the duties incumbent on me toward the Church, both universal and particular, in which, according to the provisions of the law, I have been called to exercise my service.

In fulfilling the charge entrusted to me in the name of the Church, I shall hold fast to the deposit of faith in its entirety; I shall faithfully hand it on and explain it, and I shall avoid any teachings contrary to it.

I shall follow and foster the common discipline of the entire Church and I shall maintain the observance of all ecclesiastical laws, especially those contained in the Code of Canon Law.

With Christian obedience I shall follow what the Bishops, as authentic doctors and teachers of the faith, declare, or what they, as those who govern the Church, establish. I shall also faithfully assist the diocesan Bishops, so that the apostolic activity, exercised in the name and by mandate of the Church, may be carried out in communion with the Church.

So help me God, and God’s Holy Gospels on which I place my hand.

Signed: _____ Notarised by: _____

Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen

Dated: _____ Dated: _____

APPENDIX B
KEY PERSONNEL

Presider: Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv		
Synod Preparatory Commission	Synod Secretariat	Synod Writing Group
Mackinnon, Sr. Ailsa (Chair) Guevara, Qwayne (Lead Facilitator) Camden, James James, Tessie Marshall, Rev. Paul Montierro, Gelina Moses, Kristal Reyes, Bella Riedling, Rev. Robert Sulentic, Anita	Mackinnon, Sr Ailsa (Chair) Guevara, Qwayne (Lead Facilitator) Camden, James Montierro, Gelina Moses, Kristal	Benjamin, Dr. Anne Collins, Rev. Deacon John McDermott, Kirrily Velasco, Donnie Marshall, Rev. Paul (Consultant) Riedling, Rev. Robert (Consultant)
Observers	Periti (Experts)	
Beattie, Patti Bozikis, Very Rev. Anastasios Brady, Most Rev. Terry Koo, Rt. Rev. Gary Meagher, Most Rev. Danny Oldridge, Jason Stone, Elizabeth Tobin, Luke	Austin, Dr. Rodger Beirne RSC, Dr. Sr. Margaret Connolly RSJ, Dr. Sr. Michele Kelly, Rev. Dr. Gerard	
Synod Members		
Abela, Rev. Deacon Charles Abernethy, Simon Adan, Joy Aguirre, Edwin Aldous, Matthew Amores, Macky Amos, Anna Andrew, Sr. Patty Armao, Patricia Armao, Mary Armas, Angelo Atanasious, James Austin OSA, Rev. Dave Balisbisan, Mauricio Balorio, Rev. Jessie Barakat, Armani Barreto OFM Cap, Rev. Bollar Barszczewski OP, Rev. Pawel Bernardo, Aileen Blayney EV, Very Rev. Peter Boulus, Anastasia Bowman, Benjamin Bowman, Martha Brazell, Mary Brebner, David Brennan, Royce Bright, Lisa Brogden, Veronica Brown, Judy Buhagiar, Steven Callegaro, Gian	Carlow, Rev. Adam Carroll, Dr. Sandra Casanova, Ariel Chacko MS, Rev. Jolly Cheung, David Clark, Bill Clark, Mary Como, Rosanna Cook, Sarah Crampton, Lisa Crawford, Kim Crouch AM, Elizabeth Davie, Wayne Davis, Michelle Dawson, Dominic de Groot, Jack del Rosario, Rev. Chris Dimech, Dominic Dimian, Rev. Matthew Dimo, Anna Dixon, Rev. Christopher Donaghue cfc, Br. Barry D’souza MSFS, Rev. Clifford Egan, Gerard Elkazzi, Rev. Jack Elliott, Dr. Greg Emerson, Charles Fabre, Sr. Luisa Maria Faulkner, Ian Festejo, Helen	Finucane, Sean Fornal OP, Rev. Andrew Francis, Rev. Shinto Gayed, Rev. Zakaria Giumelli, Dr. Kerry Gonsalvez, Dalton Goonan, Anthony Goonan, Wendy Gorkic, Andrew Gorkic, Ziairina Grace, Jonathan Graham, Martin Grella, Bianca Guy, Monica Guy, Greg Hancock, Merilyn Henderson, Bellinda Herft, Lorensz Hersey, Chris Hoban , Rev. Deacon Tony Hoekstra EV, Very Rev. Wim Hood, Jeff Howard, Christopher Hume OSC, Sr. Mary-Louise Huynh, Luke Ibrahim SDB, Rev. Chadi Jacobs SJ, Rev. Gregory Jacobson, Michael James, Tessie

APPENDIX B
KEY PERSONNEL (CONT.)

Joachim, Aubrey Jones, Sr. Margaret Kadambattu, Rev. Joby Kanes, Clive Karam, Corriene Kiteau, Kitisoni Koloamatangi, Rev. Viliami Ita Kozub CSFN, Sr. Margaret Kruk OP, Rev. Piotr Lam, Rev. Ephraim Lam OSA, Rev. Dr. Joseph Larkin, Chris Larkin, Cathy Lee, Mili Logronio, Marissa Maley, Chris Manjaly MS, Rev. Jose Marave, Rev. Christian Maringehosi, Rev. Deacon Batsirai Marshall, Rev. Paul Mazzega, Rev. Omar McDonnell, Evelyn McFarlane, Mons. Ron McInerney, Rev. Patrick Medilo SM, Rev. Kevin Mejia, Lourdes Mercado, Mindy Mico, Les Miller SDB, Rev. Jeff Mills, Kylie Mitri, Jack Montano, Very Rev.Luis Fernando Monteleone, Josie Moriarty, Peter Moylan, Careyanne	Mukuria, Dr. Valentine Murphy ocds, Lorraine Nekic, Daniel Nguyen, Rev. Joseph Nguyen, Tien O’Callaghan, Liz O’Callaghan, Vic Officer, Geoff Ogilvie-Ellis, Chantelle Oh, Benjamin Oxlee, Glenys Palomares, Meynard Pasion, Elizabeth Pathinather, Padmi Petrie, James Pilcher, Sr. Carmel Pirota, Rev. Deacon Roderick Pospischil, Claire Ramos, James Rayos, Raf Reddy, Joseph Suresh Redolfi, Jacob Reyes, Bella Reynolds, Rebecca Riedling, Very Rev. Robert Robles, Nolasco Rodrigues, David Rooney, Rev. Andrew Rossetto, Daniel Rutledge, Beverley Ryan, Paul Ryan, Bill Salaske-Lentern, Dr. Sebastian Sampang, Sr. Rebecca Serbati, Antonio	Silva, Rev. Treesen Slattery, Sr. Catherine Sliwa OSPPE, Rev. Wojciech Smith, Terence Smith, Mark Sorensen, Harry Sultana, Vanessa Tamayo, Precious Thomas, Claire Tom, Pressy Tomasovic, Mariana Tran, Rev. Henry Tucker, Leo Tungul, Rose Vi Tuttle, Patrick Uepa, Faaae Vave, Monica Vella, Judith-Grace Victorino, Catherine Virwani, Bernadette Walker, Adrian Watkins, Felicidad Webster, Michael Williams AM VG, Very Rev. Peter Wilson, Christopher Wilson, Andrew Worthington, Chris Yates, Michael Yee, Karen Yue, Connie Zachariah, Ann Zammit, Alan Zammit, Neville
Synod Liturgy Commission		
Walsh, Sr. Mary-Louiseh (Chair) Austin, Rev. David Austin OSA Kama, Rachael		
Additional Staff and Volunteers		
Abrams, Karin Akanis, Rita Bonwick, Eleanor Bourne, Catherine Bustria, Jeremiah Calimbas, Cecilia Caramancion, Raimie Carroll, Louis Chand, Monisha Collis, Maree Concato, Julian Fok, Alfonsus Gale, Mary Georgas, Antonella	Gormley, Jacob Grella, Eric Iemma, Marie Irawan, Joshua Kervin, Maria Khatchadourian, Taline Lee, Genevieve Lim, Cheryl Netana, Lee Portelli, Hannah Pualoa, Rosa Ramirez, Alfie Rodrigues, Nathan Ryan, Alison	Sammy, Jasmine Sewell, Maureen Smith, Monique Tamayo, Monica Trinh, Carmen Van Aken, Diane VanderHout, Marisa Watters, Chris Zitricky, Martin Videographers - Care Digital Counsellors - CSPD Early Childhood Educators - CDPSL

APPENDIX C

BISHOP VINCENT'S HOMILY FOR THE 2023 DIOCESAN SYNOD OPENING MASS

Becoming a Church receptive to the newness of the Spirit
Readings: Joel 1:13-15, 2:1-2; Luke 11:15-25

Dear friends,

It is with great sense of joy, anticipation and confidence that we have gathered for this historic occasion, that is, the celebration of our first Diocesan Synod. The Holy Spirit who has accompanied us throughout the period of preparation which included listening, praying and discerning together, will continue to guide us as we enter this transformative triduum. With humility, trust and openness, we attune our ears to listen to his voice and our hearts to receive his revelation. As Pope Francis reminds us frequently, it is the Holy Spirit who is the protagonist of the Church and it is he who ultimately is the principal agent of synodality.

60 years after the Second Vatican Council, there is a sense that we have entered a new threshold in which the totality of the People of God is the way forward. Indeed, the Church cannot be fully itself without involving everyone as co-responsible for its life and mission. The time has come for Church leaders to engage in an energetic communal search with the faithful in their dioceses if they want to be bold and creative in the task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelisation in their respective communities. This is why Pope Francis is so convinced that synodality as a new way of being Church, stating powerfully that this is what God expects of the Church in the third millennium. The Diocese of Parramatta is committed to his vision and the Diocesan Synod is an expression of our commitment to synodality.

The Word of God tonight speaks about the God who envisions a different way of being and relating for his people in the midst of a changing environment. It is the God who leads us beyond our known and limited horizons to a new future of life to the full. This life to the full is not static or a closed system but ever expanding and evolving. He accompanies us on this journey with him and with all that he created.

In the first reading, the prophet Ezekiel gives new hope to the people during the great exile. He assures them that God would bring about a new future for his people. He would gather them from all the foreign countries and bring them home. Using dramatic metaphors such as a new heart and bones with new flesh, Ezekiel calls them to do an entirely new thing. Their imminent return is not going to be a return to business as usual. It is not to rebuild the old broken system with the old symbols of power such as the land, the temple, the monarchy, the rituals etc. A new Israel would be known for its ability to love, to serve and to embody radical communion, justice and solidarity. A new Israel would be a home particularly for the poor, abandoned and dispossessed.

That is a sobering and poignant lesson for the Church today in view of devastation of the sexual abuse crisis. Like the returned exiles, we too enter a Kairos, a privileged time to rebuild ourselves not so much into a dominant institution reminiscent of some bygone era. Rather, our task during this time of cleansing and purification is to become what we are meant to be: salt of the earth and light of the world. During the time of the Roman persecution, the Church gathered in places like the catacombs. It was poor, persecuted and few in numbers. Yet it was a powerhouse of prayer, love and solidarity. Today, in the midst of diminishment, we can learn to spread the fragrance of the Gospel and to shine like the Church of the catacombs.

In the Gospel, Jesus takes up the message of Isaiah and turns it into a kind of personal manifesto. The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dead raised and Good News preached to the poor constitute the signs of God's reign. Wherever Jesus goes, people experience its in-breaking power through his person, teachings and actions. He fulfils the messianic prophecy of old and makes present the divine intent of redemption and reconciliation.

The challenge for us today is to be the Church on mission for those who long for healing, affirmation, encouragement, justice and love. We cannot be an inward-looking group but a missionary and prophetic community of disciples. We cannot be that community without engaging with those on the margins of life.

Discipleship is a journey that demands a critical discernment of the status quo and an openness to the new ways of doing things that the Holy Spirit constantly asks of us. As true believers, we can do well to listen, see and act prophetically so that the coming of the kingdom may be source of vindication, comfort and joy to us.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Pope Francis has constantly challenged us to be receptive to the newness of the Spirit and not to be smothered by the ashes of fear and by the preoccupation with the status quo. The diocesan journey of synodality is a source of renewal and a platform for agency and creativity that enables greater communion, participation and mission. Let us plough the fields for the seeds of the synodal Church to grow and bear fruit. Let us pray that we may grow through chaos and uncertainty in order to be more aligned with God's purpose.

St Paul assures us that when we are guided by the Spirit, we shall produce good fruits. May the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sent to be our advocate guide us on the journey to truth, life and wholeness. May we be re-energised for the building up of Christ's body and transformation of the world.

APPENDIX D

BISHOP VINCENT'S WELCOMING ADDRESS AT THE DIOCESAN SYNOD 2023

“Behold, I am doing a new thing!”

Dear sisters and brothers,

These words of the prophet embolden us as we come together to celebrate this historic event: the first ever synod of our young, multicultural and dynamic diocese.

I welcome you who are parishioners who represent your respective communities. You are not passive congregants but protagonists and subjects of evangelization. The Church cannot be fully itself without involving everyone as co-responsible for its life and mission. I welcome you who are members of consecrated life and, by nature, an expression of the synodality insofar as you seek to listen and act in sync with the movement of the Holy Spirit. I welcome you who are my fellow clergy, ordained to configure ourselves to Christ the humble servant and to minister in his name and by his example. I welcome fellow leaders, colleagues in ministry, advisers and observers who enrich us by your communion and participation.

We are conscious that this synod is not just about those who are here. We are joined in the communion of prayers, love and solidarity by the whole church in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. In fact, as we are the first Diocese to hold a diocesan synod after the 5th Plenary Council in Australia, many are looking to Parramatta to see how we leverage the energy and output of both the national and the universal synodal processes. What happens here will resonate beyond the walls of CommBank Stadium.

It is fitting that we began the diocesan synod with the Eucharist and the formal invocation of the Holy Spirit as our inspirator, companion and guide. It is he who purifies, strengthens and unifies us in all our differences. It is he who frees us from fear. For some of us, it might be the fear of change; while for others, it might be the fear of not much change.

Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP who gave a retreat at the Synod currently under way in Rome spoke of a shared hope that is rooted in the Eucharist. At the Last Supper, the disciples received a hope beyond all they could have imagined: the body and blood of Christ as a pledge of his everlasting love. In the light of this eucharistic hope, all their conflicting hopes find a common home. In this Synod Hall, we too shall have moments of tension and conflicting hopes. Let us not be afraid to share them and to find our common ground through Christ.

Pope Francis in his opening address of the Synod in Rome cautioned against relying on human strategies, political calculations or ideological battles. The synod hall is not a parliament where the zero-sum games are played out. Synodality is about listening, listening to each other, listening to those with different experiences, perspectives, concerns and convictions to ours. Above all, it is about listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit who leads us to wholesome truth, even at times through the most unlikely source or through a minority.

Speaking of this, I recall an incident at the Plenary Council where a debate took place as to the appropriateness of the acronym LGBTIQ+ in the Instrumentum Laboris. A motion to remove it was voted upon and it failed to achieve the required 2/3 majority. In the end, it was the minority that managed to retain the nomenclature with all it entails. As it turned out, it also found its way in the document of the Roman Synod.

We are richer and better not only because we are all like-minded, but more often than not, because we are prepared to learn and enrich ourselves with the contributions from those who are different to us. Synodality is richness in difference, unity in diversity or to use Teilhard de Chardin language, it is union in differentiation. Synodality is not individualism or clericalism. It is mutual listening which leads us to become the community of mutual empowerment.

The Holy Father reminds us, too, that we must not depart from sacred patrimony of truth while looking also to the present, to the new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world. In this way, we can exercise a faithful and creative discipleship without bitterness or nostalgia, just as our forebears demonstrated at critical junctures in the life of the Church.

Let us be inspired by our forebears in faith, particularly those who exemplified the best of faithful and creative discipleship. They had the ability to read the signs of the times and interpret them in a way that offered fresh and hopeful vision for the future despite appearances to the contrary. Let us have the courage to go out into the deep and become the effective vehicle of the Good News for all. Let us like Francis of Assisi respond to the call to go and rebuild the Church.

Finally, I want to conclude with the Pope's appeal: “Let the centrality of Christ therefore be the guiding thread of this synod. Let him be the Alpha and Omega of our discussions, let him be the light that illuminates our debates, let him be the final put of all our efforts. I am praying so the synod will succeed in achieving His own goals.”

APPENDIX E

VOTING RESULTS (TABLE)

Theme 1	Resolution	Yes Votes	No Votes	% for Yes
AN INCLUSIVE AND WELCOMING CHURCH	1A	182	9	94.70
	1B	142	50	73.95
	1C	182	10	94.79
	1D	171	19	90.00
Theme 2	Resolution	Yes Votes	No Votes	% for Yes
A HUMBLE AND HEALING CHURCH	2A	155	32	82.90
	2B	161	25	86.56
	2C	72	115	38.50
	2D	168	18	90.32
Theme 3	Resolution	Yes Votes	No Votes	% for Yes
A LISTENING CHURCH	3A	170	15	91.89
	3B	152	34	81.72
	3C	165	20	90.81
Theme 4	Resolution	Yes Votes	No Votes	% for Yes
A CHURCH RENEWED IN SPIRIT AND PRAYER	4A	188	3	98.43
	4B	163	28	85.34
	4C	182	8	95.79
	4D	163	27	85.79
	4E	62	127	32.80
Theme 5	Resolution	Yes Votes	No Votes	% for Yes
A CHURCH THAT REACHES TO THE MARGINS	5A	173	3	98.30
	5B	171	5	97.16
	5C	174	2	98.86
	5D	146	30	82.95
Theme 6	Resolution	Yes Votes	No Votes	% for Yes
A CHURCH WALKING TOGETHER	6A	173	10	94.54
	6B	168	18	90.32
	6C	155	30	83.78
	6D	172	13	92.97
	6E	154	28	84.61
Review of Consultative Votes	Resolution	Yes Votes	No Votes	% for Yes
Theme 2: A HUMBLE AND HEALING CHURCH	2C Revised	121	60	66.85

APPENDIX F

BISHOP VINCENT'S HOMILY FOR THE 2023 DIOCESAN SYNOD CLOSING MASS

Being synodal as an expression of authentic discipleship
Readings: Isaiah 25:6-10; Phil 4:12-20; Matt 22:1-14

Dear sisters and brothers,

We have done it! We have celebrated the first synod for the Diocese and the first local synod ever after the 5th Plenary Council in Australia. Despite many challenges, not the least of which was the diversity of life experiences, perspectives and even convictions, we have gathered to pray, listen and discern the pathways into the future under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This has been a historic event and we give thanks to God for it.

This Diocesan Synod has been a moment of grace, a celebration of hope and a deepening of commitment. Like the disciples with Mary in the Upper Room, we were bonded in one common faith, one baptism and one Lord. Despite our differences, which were many and intense at times, we have journeyed together with our gaze fixed on the Lord of the journey.

Scriptures on this 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time speak to us about hope in the time of pain and darkness. The God of our ancestors in faith does not shield us from the ebbs and flows of history. But neither does he remain unmoved by our changing fortunes. He leads us and empowers us to move beyond our fears to live a life of faith, hope, love and service. In Jesus, he calls us and forms us into living embodiment of the God who cares for his people.

In the first reading, Isaiah speaks prophetically of the renewal of Israel after the exile. He maintains against all evidence to the contrary that God will remake a battered nation and a humiliated people. A veil of mourning will be removed and a banquet of rich foods will be prepared for the poor and the remnant faithful. Tears will be wiped away from every cheek and even death be destroyed forever. Isaiah reframes the experience of his people in new and hopeful horizons. The exile, he insists, will have a transformative effect.

Isaiah's prophecy is not about some pie in the sky or a utopia. The real challenge here for Israel is to be faithful to the vision that God committed them to ever since the exodus from Egypt. That vision is a vision of an alternative society where the poor and the vulnerable are dignified, where there is no injustice and oppression. The journey or the return to the Promised Land was not so much a physical as a spiritual exercise. To make Israel a model society and to make every believer a member of this ideal society is indeed a life-long project. Ours like the Israelites' response to this call to mission is not fear, resistance, despair and defeat. It must be faith-filled, humble, joyful and unwavering commitment.

This is what the parable of the wedding banquet calls for. The invited have no interest in God's invitation. They treat the king's messengers with contempt. The wedding banquet hall is then open to all who respond despite their lowly status. Arrogance, self-righteousness, complacency on account of who we are and what we have achieved will not gain us entry into the kingdom. Rather it is how we reflect God's limitless capacity to love and forgive. It is the garment of mercy and compassion that we are found wearing at the banquet hall.

Matthew often uses small but significant symbols to highlight the importance of authentic discipleship. Thus, for instance, the guest without the garment is disinvited and removed. The garment stands for one's commitment to Christian living without which there is no admittance to the kingdom. Likewise, in the parable of the bridesmaids, there is no substitute for the oil of service, love and compassion.

For Matthew and the early Christian community, it is faith-in-action that matters. True discipleship consisting of selfless service to the least and the last is what puts us in good stead before the judgment seat of God. It is not one's status, privilege and entitlement but discipleship in action that counts. Jesus repudiates the Pharisaic notion that worthiness is based on one's attributes, abilities and connections rather than personal integrity.

Dear brothers and sisters,

We live in uncertain and challenging times. Christianity may be returning to the earlier times in terms of being a marginalised or even unpopular minority. But if we follow the example of our ancestors and the early Church in being an alternative society, a community of justice, inclusivity, solidarity, prayer, and support, then it is the future worth dedicating our lives to.

Inspired by the example of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit on the Diocesan Synod, may we go forth and embody the new way of being Church together, sharing responsibility and proclaiming God's Kingdom. In a way, our task is not yet done. It has only just begun. For being synodal is not merely an event but a new way of communion, participation and mission, which is rooted in our discipleship. As we move into a new era, may we grow to be a more fit for purpose Church, so that we can be a more effective vehicle for the Good News. May we experience renewal in our local Church today and for generations to come.

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