



DIOCESE of  
PARRAMATTA



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE 2023 DIOCESAN SYNOD

## 1. What is a diocesan synod?

A Synod is both an event and a process where clergy, consecrated, and the laity gather to discuss important matters relating to the life and mission of the Church. Synods are transformative events that lead to renewal in the Church's life.

## 2. Why do we need a Synod when the community has spoken through the Plenary? Will the Synod override the outcomes of the Plenary?

The Plenary Council in Australia and a diocesan synod serve different purposes and operate at different levels within the Church. While they both involve consultations and discussions, they have distinct focuses and scopes. A Plenary Council is held on a national level and aims to address significant pastoral and mission-related matters that are relevant to the entire Church in Australia. On the other hand, a diocesan synod is specific to a particular diocese and focuses on local concerns, administrative matters, and pastoral strategies that are relevant within the diocese.

The existence of both a Plenary Council and diocesan synods allows for a multilayered approach to discernment and decision-making within the Catholic Church. The Plenary Council addresses broader national or regional issues, while diocesan synods provide an opportunity for local communities to have a voice in shaping their own pastoral direction. It is important to note that the outcomes of the Plenary Council and diocesan synods are not in competition with each other. Instead, they complement each other, as the Church seeks to discern and respond to the needs of both the universal Church and the local communities. The insights and recommendations from both the Plenary Council and diocesan synods contribute to the ongoing growth and development of the Church in its mission to proclaim the Gospel and serve the faithful.

While both the Plenary Council and diocesan synods are important consultative processes, the Plenary Council holds a higher level of authority and its outcomes are not overridden by decisions made at the diocesan level.

## 3. We didn't see any changes come from the Plenary Council. Why should we expect change from the Diocesan Synod?

The Plenary Council is in its Implementation phase, taking place over a period of five years. The 10 decrees of the Plenary Council have been published and have been sent to the Holy See to review. In accordance with canon 446 of the Code of Canon Law, decrees are not to be promulgated until they have been reviewed by the Apostolic See. The decrees will oblige six months after promulgation.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference published *Carrying Forward the Plenary Council: As we continue the journey together*. The document invites Catholic parishes, schools and other communities to pray about, reflect upon and review what they are already doing, or could be doing, in relation to acting on the commitments the Council members made in the decrees.

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shaping their own pastoral direction. the nature of the Church's mission, young people and family life. The synodal journey begun by the Pope in 2013 will find more expression in two summits of bishops in Rome in October 2023 and October 2024. Bishop Vincent has set the Parramatta Diocese on a parallel track of convening a Synod process beginning also in October 2023 and mid-year 2024.

#### **4. How is a diocesan synod different from the Universal Synod?**

The Universal synod was called by Pope Francis and the Diocesan Synod called by Bishop Vincent are synods in the same general sense, but each have a different scope, different members, and address different matters relating to the church. Specifically, the Universal synod will focus on matters that affect the universal Church around the world, and the Diocesan synod will focus on discerning the direction of the mission and ministry of the local church in Parramatta, which will inform the development of our Diocesan pastoral plan and chart a new pathway for the Diocese.

#### **5. What happens at a Diocesan Synod?**

After a preparatory phase, that includes listening sessions from people in the diocese followed by the development of a working document, a Diocesan Synod assembly will take place. Our Diocesan Synod will be held from the 12-15 October 2023. During the synod, members of the synod discuss and present resolutions, based on the stories, themes and proposals presented.

#### **6. Can a Diocesan Synod change Church teaching or address issues of doctrine?**

No. While a Diocesan Synod holds an important consultative role within the diocese, it does not have the authority to change Church teaching or address issues of doctrine. Doctrine and Church teaching are determined by the broader magisterium, which consists of the Pope and the College of Bishops in communion with him. Changes to Church doctrine or teachings would require the deliberation and decision of the universal magisterium, such as an ecumenical council convened by the Pope or a definitive statement issued by the Pope himself.

Diocesan Synods primarily focus on matters related to pastoral care, evangelisation, and the specific needs of the local diocese. They may discuss and provide recommendations on pastoral strategies, local policies, and initiatives to address specific challenges within the diocese. However, any decisions made by a Diocesan Synod must be in harmony with the broader teachings of the Catholic Church as handed down by the magisterium.

#### **7. Can members of the Synod pass new rules and laws at a Diocesan Synod?**

No. Authority remains with the diocesan bishop at the Synod to formally establish any binding rules or laws. Members of the Synod only provide discussion and a consultative vote to the diocesan bishop for his consideration. The bishop's role in this process is crucial because he has the ultimate responsibility for the governance of the diocese.

It's important to note that the particular laws passed by a Diocesan Synod must be in accordance with the general laws and teachings of the Catholic Church. They cannot contradict or supersede the universal laws and teachings of the Church, as established by the magisterium.

Therefore, while a Diocesan Synod can pass new rules and laws at the diocesan level, they operate within the framework of broader Church law and teachings..

## 8. What happens after the Diocesan Synod assembly?

After the Diocesan Synod in October, the discussions, resolutions, and recommendations made during the Synod are documented and compiled into a formal report. This report serves as a record of the synodal proceedings and outcomes.

After listening prayerfully to the voices of the faithful throughout the Synod, Bishop Vincent Long will prayerfully reflect and discern the resolutions and recommendations put forth by the members of the Synod.

All input will be considered but may not lead to direct action. If the bishop decides to enact specific resolutions or recommendations as particular laws for the diocese, he promulgates them through a decree. These particular laws are binding within the diocese and help guide pastoral practice and governance.

The bishop, in collaboration with his advisors and diocesan officials, implements the synodal resolutions and particular laws. This may involve developing pastoral plans, updating policies, or initiating specific programs or initiatives within the diocese. The diocesan administration ensures that the synodal outcomes are effectively communicated to the clergy, religious, and faithful of the diocese.

Bishop Vincent will issue a Diocesan Pastoral/Action plan outlining the next steps coming out of the Diocesan Synod. In 2024, there will be a Diocesan Gathering, where our community will gather to celebrate and launch the outcomes and plans beyond the Synod. Implementation of the pastoral plan will take place over many years in the Diocese.