



DIOCESE *of*  
PARRAMATTA

# DRAFT

Diocesan Plan for a Synodal Church  
in the Diocese of Parramatta

APRIL 2024

## Acknowledgment of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands in which the Diocese of Parramatta sits, the land of the Darug and Gundungurra people.

We pay our respects to First Peoples past, present and emerging for they hold the traditions, memories and wisdom entwined with the land that we meet on today.

## Statement of Commitment to the Uluru Statement of the Heart

The Diocese of Parramatta sits in the traditional lands of the Darug and Gundungurra people and has the largest population of urban Aboriginal people in Australia. Therefore, in alignment with the Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference 2023-2024 Social Justice Statement *Listen, Learn, Love: A New Evangelisation With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, the Diocese of Parramatta endorses the *Uluru Statement of the Heart* and commits to the ongoing pursuit of justice through voice, treaty, and truth for our First Nations people.

Through collaborative partnerships, cultural awareness initiatives, pastoral support, and advocacy for justice and reconciliation, the Diocese will continue to honour and respect the unique cultural heritage of our First Nations peoples while promoting unity, understanding, and mutual respect.

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**Sensitive content advisory warning:**

Please be aware that this document addresses the realities of daily life candidly, including sensitive topics such as violence, abuse, dispossession, and mental health.

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# Bishop's Statement

*To be included in the complete and final version.*

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# Mission and Vision – The People of God in the Parramatta Diocese Walking Together

This document formulates a Diocesan Plan for a Synodal Church in the Diocese of in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains.

It is therefore important to articulate what the elements of a Synodal Church are, so that as we walk together as the People of God (in fidelity to the mission that the Lord has entrusted to us), we don't just produce another document, but open horizons of hope for the fulfilment of the Church's mission here in the Diocese of Parramatta.<sup>1</sup>

## Our Journey So Far

From the time of its foundation in 1986, our Diocese has walked the path of renewal according to the vision of Vatican II. Bishop Bede Heather, the first Bishop of the Diocese, took for his motto *Sacrosanctum Concilium* or *This Sacred Council*. Inspired by the council to “impart an ever increasing vigour to the Christian life of the faithful”<sup>2</sup> Bishop Bede instilled within our foundations a vision for the church rooted in service and rebirth. This vision was continued by his successors, Bishop Kevin Manning and then Bishop Anthony Fisher who, in 2014 released *Faith In Our Future*, a Pastoral Plan for the Diocese of Parramatta. This document invited all the faithful in the Diocese to grow in faith and to share that faith with others.<sup>3</sup>

More recently under the pontificate of Pope Francis, all the People of God have been invited to walk the path of synodality to realise “what God expects of the Church of the third millennium”<sup>4</sup>. Responding to this invitation and the experience of Australia's own Plenary Council, Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv the fourth Bishop of Parramatta convened our first Diocesan Synod in 2023.

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In the Gospel of Luke, the Risen Lord with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), provides a paradigmatic account of a synodal Church. As the experience of the two disciples demonstrates, conversation in the Spirit, a synodal Church, builds communion and brings missionary dynamism.<sup>5</sup>

## A Synodal Church:

*“We must continue along this path. The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium”<sup>6</sup>*

The Path of Synodality calls all in the church to walk together in holiness, led by the movement of the Holy Spirit and grounded in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith. Synodality is a practice that draws its roots from the early church, and has found renewed expression in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. In the years following the council Pope Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops to ensure that the conciliar experience of Vatican II was maintained within the life of the church.

A Synodal church is inspired by the Trinitarian dynamic of encounter and relational love. All the faithful are called to animate this love in their lives and to inform the daily life of the Church, universal and particular.<sup>7</sup> Whenever the faithful encounter another person in love, they learn something new about God. Whenever their eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, they grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God.<sup>8</sup>

Pope Francis articulated this way of being Church in *Evangelii Gaudium*, when he talked about how the Bishop “will sometimes go before his people, pointing the way and keeping their hope vibrant. At other times, he will simply be in their midst with his unassuming and merciful presence. At yet other times, he will have to walk

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<sup>1</sup> Instrumentum Laboris (2023) # 3.

<sup>2</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium (1963) # 1.

<sup>3</sup> Faith in Our Future: A Pastoral Plan for the Diocese of Parramatta 2014-2018

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops,” Vatican City, October 17, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Number 36, *Instrumentum Laboris* for the First Session (October 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops,” Vatican City, October 17, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Number 34, *Instrumentum Laboris* for the First Session (October 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Number 40, *Instrumentum Laboris* for the First Session (October 2023).

after them, helping those who lag behind and - above all - allowing the flock to strike out on new paths.”<sup>9</sup> What is said of the Bishop, is equally true of all our leaders.

Central to the vision of a Synodal church is an understanding of:

1. **The church as the people of God walking together.** This promotes a passage from ‘I’ to ‘we’, involving and energising the entire community, offering an encounter in faith, that strengthens the bond with the Lord, creating fraternity among people and love for the Church.<sup>10</sup>
2. **A Theology of Baptism as the foundation of missionary co-responsibility.**<sup>11</sup> A Synodal Church makes all the faithful sons and daughters of God, members of the family of God, brothers and sisters in Christ.<sup>12</sup> Through Baptism, they become co-responsible for creating the spaces that allow all to participate in the mission of the Church.<sup>13</sup>
3. **The Sensus Fidei.** As understood in the Dogmatic Constitution of the Catholic Church, *Lumen Gentium*, “The holy people of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to His name. The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief.”<sup>14</sup>
4. **The action of the Holy Spirit.** This is central to an understanding of a Synodal Church as “it is the action of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church along its path by guaranteeing its fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus”<sup>15</sup>
5. **The Diversity of Gifts/Charisms**<sup>16</sup>. A Synodal Church understands and values the diverse charisms that are present among the baptised and calls all to use these gifts to actively participate in the mission of the church.
6. **A relational way of looking at the world and all creation**<sup>17</sup>. A Synodal church is formed in the Trinitarian relationship which bonds all created things together in the infinite love of God.
7. **Requires a communal search in the way forward when making ecclesial decisions**<sup>18</sup>. It is no longer possible for pastoral plans to be devised and carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful are passive recipients or worse bystanders.<sup>19</sup> Synodal life is expressed in inclusive structures and processes in every phase whenever the Church is called together, implementing her essential synodality.<sup>20</sup>

These understandings are brought to life by a church that:

- **listens** attentively to the lived experiences of people. It is through this listening that the church is transformed by the Spirit.<sup>21</sup>
- **promotes encounter and dialogue** with believers of other religions, with all cultures and societies, but above all among the many differences that run through the Church itself.<sup>22</sup> This transforms all the relationships the Church establishes among its members, other faith communities, and society as a whole, especially towards those whose voice is most often ignored.<sup>23</sup>
- **creates spaces and cultures of discernment** as this invites the action of the Holy Spirit, who calls us to recognise the signs of his presence through the sharing of life experiences.<sup>24</sup>
- **desires to be humble** as it knows that it must ask forgiveness and has much to learn. The Church constantly needs to renew itself, opening paths of reconciliation, healing and justice.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Evangelii Gaudium #31

<sup>10</sup> Number 17, *Instrumentum Laboris for the First Session* (October 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis. (2021). *Walking Together: The Way of Synodality*. [Sr Natalie Becquart]. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

<sup>12</sup> Number 20, *Instrumentum Laboris for the First Session* (October 2023).

<sup>13</sup> Number 20 and 21, *Instrumentum Laboris for the First Session* (October 2023).

<sup>14</sup> *Lumen gentium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964), §12.

<sup>15</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and Mission of the Church* (March 2, 2018), 21.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis. (2021). *Walking Together: The Way of Synodality*. [Sr Natalie Becquart].

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis. (2021). *Walking Together: The Way of Synodality*. [Sr Natalie Becquart].

<sup>18</sup> Evangelium Gaudium # 33

<sup>19</sup> Evangelium Gaudium #120

<sup>20</sup> Synodality in the life and mission of the church, # 76.

<sup>21</sup> Number 18, *Instrumentum Laboris for the First Session* (October 2023).

<sup>22</sup> Number 25, *Instrumentum Laboris for the First Session* (October 2023).

<sup>23</sup> Number 22, *Instrumentum Laboris for the First Session* (October 2023).

<sup>24</sup> Number 31 and 34, *Instrumentum Laboris for the First Session* (October 2023).

<sup>25</sup> Number 23, *Instrumentum Laboris for the First Session* (October 2023).

The People of God in the Diocese of Parramatta are committed to the ongoing work of growing in the synodal way of being as they walk together along the path to greater communion, participation, and mission in the heart of Western Sydney.

## Deep Calling to Dadirri

In Australia, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sisters and brothers, who have lived in this land for thousands of years have much to teach us. As we launch this Diocesan Plan it is important to acknowledge the wisdom and learning that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples share with us.

In 1986 in Alice Springs, Pope Saint John Paul II, declared to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people that:

*You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you. And the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.<sup>26</sup>*

From the Ngan'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri languages of the Aboriginal peoples of the Daly River region, Northern Territory, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann has articulated for us the concept of *dadirri* (inner deep listening and quiet still awareness). For the Church in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains to become more synodal, it requires us to recognise the truth of *dadirri* and to actively put it into practice. A beautiful element is to acknowledge that this truth is not just for our interactions in the Church or finding the Holy Spirit in the signs of the times but in our relationships, with each other and our fragile environment. God asked the first humans to be stewards of creation (Genesis 1:28) and while sin caused a divide between us, even leading to Cain killing Abel, *dadirri* challenges us in a synodal way to care for all that God created, not just ourselves.

In articulating *dadirri* Miriam-Rose recognises that it is more than a technique but in the silent awareness, even grief can be overcome and we can be made whole again. *Dadirri* allows our stories to be told and heard but more than that, it allows development and movement in our lives. We move from being the listeners to the story-tellers. *Dadirri* moves beyond conflict or clever theological arguments to the truth of our human experience and that is where God can be found. God can be found when we truly listen. The process of listening used in our Synod, described as "Conversation in the Spirit", mirrors the deep listening required in *Dadirri*.

The second element of *dadirri* is the quiet stillness and the waiting. Our First Nations peoples have always been willing to let things follow their natural course, to refrain from coming up with an easy answer or to hurry things along. In a whole range of ways, First Nations peoples are willing to wait until the time is right, and this is a great lesson to be learned for the Church in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. Answers need not be given immediately, for waiting illustrates how we are not distracted but focused on what is before us. Modern cultures prioritise efficiency but we are invited to recognise that with God, there is nothing more important than remaining in the present moment.

*Dadirri* can resonate in many different areas of our lives. The People of God in Parramatta are encouraged to prayerfully reflect on how *dadirri* can affirm our resolve to be a Synodal Church in the Diocese.

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<sup>26</sup> Address Pope John Paul II in Alice Springs 29 November 1986, #13.



# Our Parramatta Synod - 'We sit on the old mat as we weave the new'

*Bishop Vincent Long*

The Parramatta Synod presented a profound opportunity to listen to what the Spirit is saying in and through the people of God in the Diocese.

Our focused listening and dialogue sessions captured 1020 submissions which were synthesised into the six themes for a synodal church. These are:

1. An Inclusive and Welcoming Church
2. A humble and healing Church
3. A listening Church
4. A Church renewed in spirit and prayer
5. A Church that reaches to the margins
6. A Church walking together.

Each of the themes was then expressed in a total of 25 resolutions, 24 of which achieved a majority consultative vote in the Synod hall.

In the Synod hall, members shared their reflections from the floor and submitted ideas, suggestions, hopes, and concerns for the future. These reflections were all captured, collated, and shared with the Diocesan Plan Writing Group, who undertook the task of reading and analysing them. This process led to the articulation of four 'threads' that ran through the reflections. They are:

- a. Identity and Mission
- b. Listening and Dialogue
- c. Partnerships and Community
- d. Formation and Education

These threads have been woven through the responses to each of the themes and resolutions in this document and will be key to the diocesan and local responses to the six themes of a synodal church.

# THEME 1: An inclusive and welcoming Church

*"In the Church, no one is left out or left over. There is room for everyone. Just the way we are. Everyone. Jesus says this clearly. When he sends the apostles to invite people to the banquet which a man had prepared, he tells them: "Go out and bring in everyone", young and old, healthy and infirm, righteous and sinners. Everyone, everyone, everyone! In the Church there is room for everyone.... That is the Church, the Mother of all. There is room for everyone. The Lord does not point a finger but opens his arms."*<sup>27</sup>

Pope Francis reminds us of Jesus' call that everyone is welcome in the Church. That as the baptised people of God we each have a personal responsibility to contribute positively to building a culture of welcome, hospitality and meaningful connection within the Church community. In responding to Christ's invitation for his disciples to "go out and bring in everyone," we the people of God in Parramatta, need to be honest about the fact that we have often failed to welcome, and perhaps, continue to exclude many. Put another way, we need to ask ourselves if all people, including the divorced, people with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, First Nations peoples and members of the LGBTIQA+ community, feel welcome in our gatherings?

Developing a shared understanding of a culture of welcome, hospitality and meaningful connection is critical to making 'room for everyone'. To explore what this looks like, in our faith communities we need to identify the areas of biggest need and develop actions which uplift and create a truly Christ-centred culture in the Church.

The fabric of our Church's culture is woven from the threads of its members. Intentionally seeking out the unique gifts of the faithful is essential if we are to build a culture of welcome and support local faith communities to accompany families, in all their diverse structures and circumstances.

## **Diocesan resolutions passed at the Synod Assembly:**

- 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.

<sup>27</sup> Pope Francis, *Welcoming Ceremony, World Youth Day, Portugal, August 2023*. <http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/august/documents/20230803-portogallo-cerimonia-accoglienza.html>

**Diocesan response:**

- In striving to foster a culture of welcome, hospitality, and meaningful connection for all within the Church, the Diocese will discern and establish an appropriate advisory forum. This forum may serve as an opportunity for those who experience exclusion to share their voices and offer valuable insights and recommendations on matters of inclusion. It also aims to support the development of essential initiatives and resources to empower local faith communities and Diocesan ministries.
- The Diocese, guided by relevant voices, will co-develop a formation program which aims to enhance the understanding of a culture of welcome, hospitality and meaningful connection for all within the Church. This program should provide opportunities for continuous education and formation for individuals and faith communities to enhance capacity and capability in cultivating a culture of welcome for all. The program is supported by a discernment framework and relevant tools and templates, that empower local faith communities to effectively implement actions and interventions locally to most suitably meet the areas of greatest need.
- Given the critical engagement point with families, that the Diocese would conduct work to reimagine and co-design sacramental programs (with Sacramental Coordinators, CSPD and Catechists) to enhance the quality and standardise across the Diocese, establishing mechanisms and cadences for effective collaboration, knowledge and resource sharing to better realise the full potential this opportunity to support, accompany and build meaningful connections with families, in all their diverse structures and circumstances.

**Local community response:**

*Think Tank sessions will inform this section.*

**Local community reflection and discernment questions:**

1. How can our faith community better understand and meet the needs of those who may feel excluded? What steps can we take to actively seek their participation and listen to their voices?
2. What are some concrete actions our faith community can take to better welcome and include all individuals, especially those who have historically felt marginalised or unwelcome?
3. Reflect on the unique gifts and talents within our faith community. How can we better identify, celebrate, and utilise these for the purpose of building a more inclusive and welcoming church?

In what practical ways can we encourage and facilitate more meaningful connections among community members, particularly between those of diverse backgrounds or life situations? How can these connections strengthen our communal faith and witness to the broader society?

## THEME 2: A humble and healing Church

*We are all sinners, we have all sinned... "The church is not a community of perfect people, but of disciples on a journey, who follow the Lord because they know they are sinners and in need of his pardon. Thus, Christian life is a school of humility which opens us to grace".<sup>28</sup>*

It remains our hope and prayer that all that we have done, are doing and will do, may help to bring healing to those so gravely harmed when in the Church's care. We acknowledge the ongoing damage done to the People of God, particularly by clerical sexual abuse and by the abuse of power in our church, in our communities, and in our families. As a Diocesan community, we commit to work for justice and healing and to recognising and responding to violence in all its forms.

We humbly acknowledge the truth of our nation's founding story and the associated violence and dispossession suffered by First Nations people. As Pope St John Paul II recognised: *for thousands of years you have lived in this land and fashioned a culture that endures to this day. And during all this time, the Spirit of God has been with you. Your "Dreaming", which influences your lives so strongly that, no matter what happens, you remain forever people of your culture, is your only way of touching the mystery of God's Spirit in you and in creation. Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear<sup>29</sup> because, for us, you and the values you represent are precious.<sup>30</sup>*

Today, however, the truth remains that Aboriginal culture and its values continue to be ruptured as evidenced by the crisis of high incarceration rates, especially of young people, widespread family breakdown and children alienated from family and country. The link between land/country and culture is fundamental to Aboriginal identity. Alienation is the direct result of the forced separation of families from each other and from their country that has occurred since the earliest days of colonisation.

Following the example of Jesus, who continually challenged injustice and modelled inclusion and respect in all his encounters, the Diocese of Parramatta endorses the *Uluru Statement of the Heart* and commits to the urgent work of reconciliation and the ongoing pursuit of justice through voice, treaty, and truth-telling for our First Nations People.

As followers of Jesus, we appreciate that his Spirit is present in many ways in our city and suburbs, working through those who share our faith as well as the many who follow a different path in their search for truth and meaning. We understand that rapidly declining religious affiliation across our country is a sign of the times that calls us to step outside the familiar and the comfortable and to engage respectfully with others who do not share our faith or are alienated from the Church. Often it is these same people who, because of their generous and unstinting outreach to those on the margins, also challenge those of us who claim to follow the example of Jesus.

If we listen attentively, we learn to recognise the new and different ways by which the Spirit of Jesus continues to breathe God's goodness and speak God's word in our fractured world. Encouraged and challenged by the refrain of Psalm 95, "if today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts", we listen for God's voice, especially in those unexpected or uncomfortable encounters or places. As a synodal community of faith, we commit to build connections with all - believers and non-believers alike - who are working to make our communities better places.

### **Diocesan resolutions passed at the Synod Assembly:**

- 2A.** The Diocese will continue to offer its unreserved and deepest apologies to those who have been betrayed through sexual and 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.** 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.

<sup>28</sup> Pope Francis General Audience 13 April 2016

<sup>29</sup> Pope St John Paul II, Alice Springs, 1986 © Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>30</sup> Pope St Paul VI, 1970 © Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

#### **Diocesan response:**

- At specified liturgical and other gatherings of the faithful, the Diocese will continue to express deep sorrow and lament for the grave harm committed against many while in the Church's care. In partnership with Catholic Care and other agencies, the Diocese will continue to resource processes for safeguarding, healing and support, especially for those enduring violence in their relationships and their homes.
- The Diocese will support the ongoing collaboration of the Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Office and Sydney Alliance with First Nations People of our Diocese, creating opportunities to listen, share stories, learn from their wisdom and relationship with the land, and engage in meaningful dialogue and truth-telling.
- The Diocese will resource the development of a Diocesan Reconciliation Plan that will include the active participation of all major agencies and will serve as a template for local faith communities to shape their response.
- Pope St John Paul II was very clear about the need for liturgy to reflect culture when he said to the First Nations people in Alice Springs: *The Church invites you to express the living word of Jesus in ways that speak to your Aboriginal minds and hearts. All over the world people worship God and read [his] word in their own language, and colour the great signs and symbols of religion with touches of their own traditions. Why should you be different from them in this regard, why should you not be allowed the happiness of being with God and each other in Aboriginal fashion?*<sup>1</sup>

In synodal partnership with local First Nations people, The Diocesan Liturgical Commission will develop templates for acknowledging traditional custodians of the land and explore various liturgical expressions that include "touches of their own traditions".

- The Diocese recognises that working for the common good is happening both within and beyond our own faith community. Our mission effectiveness can only be enhanced by walking synodally alongside and building stronger partnerships with other civic and faith groups, sharing wisdom, experience and resources.

#### **Local community response:**

*Think Tank sessions will inform this section.*

#### **Local community reflection and discernment questions:**

1. How can our community learn to talk about the pervasive nature of violence and understand it as an abuse of power in any situation, including the family, the church and the workplace?
2. How can we engage in deep listening and meaningful dialogue with local First Nations People and participate in the Diocesan Reconciliation Plan?
3. How do we understand our baptismal call to be missionary disciples - as a local faith community and in partnership with other local groups? What education and formation do we need?

## THEME 3: A listening Church

*“It is only by paying attention to whom we listen, to what we listen, and to how we listen that we can grow in the art of communicating, the heart of which is not a theory or a technique, but the “openness of heart that makes closeness possible”<sup>31</sup>*

Building on the magisterial teachings of previous pontiffs, Pope Francis released his encyclical letter on ecology and climate, *Laudato Si’ On Care For Our Common Home* in 2013. In the years since, the global Catholic Church has been called to give bold witness to the dignity of creation and to respond to the cry of the poor, who are often the most impacted by the ongoing effects of the climate crisis. Rooted deep within our creation is the charge, given by God, to till and keep the earth.<sup>32</sup> However, in the years since the release of *Laudato Si’* far too little has been done by the People of God and by all people to shoulder the reality of the climate crisis.

The Diocese of Parramatta is blessed with rich diversity and great natural beauty. Many who have come from across the seas have chosen to call her home and to share their gifts and cultures with her people. Defined by her two great rivers, and the beautiful World Heritage-listed Blue Mountains, the Diocese has also heard some of the loudest cries of the earth as ‘she groans in travail’<sup>33</sup> through fires, floods, and extreme heat. Many of her diverse communities, particularly the poor and vulnerable, now experience greater stress due to heat and higher food prices brought on by the increased impacts of the climate crisis here in Australia and around the world. However, ‘the climate crisis is not exactly a matter that interests the great economic powers, whose concern is with the greatest profit possible at minimal cost and in the shortest amount of time.’<sup>34</sup>

The People of God here in the Diocese of Parramatta are challenged to ‘create a new culture’<sup>35</sup> characterised by greater awareness of and action toward care for our common home. Parishes and schools should aspire to be leaders in ecological awareness and justice in their local communities by how they reduce waste, consume energy, and consider the ongoing consequences of their actions on the environment. So too families and all the People of God are called to an ecological conversion, responding to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

The young people of the Diocese represent not only her future but also her present. They bring with them a passion for inclusion, justice and a desire to belong in communities that know their value and listen to their voice. They hope for a future in which they can enjoy the security of previous generations. The church in Parramatta is committed to the *metanoia* which comes from listening with the ear of her heart to the voices of young people, of those from different cultural backgrounds, and of creation herself.

### Diocesan resolutions passed at the Synod Assembly:

- 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 Platform.
- 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

<sup>31</sup> Vatican News. (2022). Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 56th World Day of Social Communications.

<sup>32</sup> Genesis 2:15

<sup>33</sup> *Laudato Si’* #.2

<sup>34</sup> *Laudato Deum*, #13

<sup>35</sup> *Laudato Deum*, # 71

**Diocesan response:**

- All large agencies, ministries and organisations within the Diocese will establish a Laudato Si' Action Plan by the end of 2025 and commit to ambitious targets to reduce the ongoing impacts of the climate crisis. These will serve as templates for local faith communities to shape their response.
- The Diocese will commit to supporting young people through strengthened partnerships (particularly Catholic Youth Parramatta and Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese) that promote ministry and outreach opportunities designed to encourage continued engagement in the life and mission of the Church.
- Ongoing synodal processes will be established for young people to ensure they are consulted in decision-making processes, particularly regarding decisions that directly impact them.
- The Diocesan Interfaith and Ecumenical Commission and the various ethnic chaplaincies will partner with the Diocesan Liturgical Commission to create and share education and formation materials for local communities in a way that respects and celebrates the various rich cultural traditions that are part of the Diocese.

**Local community response:**

*Think Tank sessions will inform this section.*

**Local community reflection and discernment questions:**

1. How can our community listen to the voices of young people as we define meaningful ways for them to contribute to our liturgical and pastoral life?
2. How can we work collaboratively with local First Nations Peoples and civic organisations such as local councils to discern place-based responses to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor?
3. How can we work to create culturally safe spaces for all, and what education and formation do we need?

## THEME 4: A Church renewed in spirit and prayer

*‘For it is the liturgy through which, especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, “the work of our redemption is accomplished,” and it is through the liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church’<sup>36</sup>*

The Church in Parramatta wishes to express more strongly that all the baptised share co-responsibility in our church’s mission. A Synodal Church challenges each member of the Diocese to fully embrace their baptismal call and to respond by full and active liturgical participation. For it is by being nourished at the Altar that people go out to minister and serve others and in fact the whole world.

A phrase from Thomas Aquinas is very important in this context, ‘Whatever is received, is received in the manner of the receiver’ (*Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*). For all our knowledge and preparation is not for ourselves but so that the truth is revealed. For our commitment to becoming a synodal church means that we share opportunities to be formed together.

### **Diocesan resolutions passed at the Synod Assembly:**

- 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.

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<sup>36</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium # 2.



**Diocesan response:**

- Establish partnerships with experts and Adult Faith Formation providers to produce high-quality formation programs drawing on Biblical studies, the rich and diverse Catholic spiritual traditions, Church history, liturgy, theology, and Catholic social teaching.
- Promote and highlight the liturgical training for lectors and acolytes open to all confirmed Catholics.
- Create a database of high-quality liturgical music and make suggestions for major feasts available to local communities.
- Prioritise the development of Homiletic resource packs with templates, and suggestions to support quality and consistent homilies across the Diocese.

**Local community response:**

*Think Tank sessions will inform this section.*

**Local community reflection and discernment questions:**

1. How can we open our formation opportunities to include other members of the Church?
2. How can we develop and promote liturgical opportunities and 'spaces' for the expression of faith that are more open and inclusive, reflecting the rich cultural diversity of the community?
3. What skills and interests exist in our community that could enhance our celebration and prayer? What formation is needed to support this?
4. How can clergy and lay leaders construct and deliver homilies and public addresses that better respond to the minds and hearts and circumstances of the people to whom they minister?
5. How can parents be better supported, especially with formation opportunities dedicated to them, in their roles as the first educators of their children?

# THEME 5: A Church that reaches to the margins

*“We cannot be indifferent to suffering; we cannot allow anyone to go through life as an outcast. Instead, we should feel indignant, challenged to emerge from our comfortable isolation and to be changed by our contact with human suffering. That is the meaning of dignity”<sup>37</sup>*

The Word of God, pondered in the Scriptures, constantly calls us to notice, to listen, to attend to voices of the vulnerable and those who suffer. These are voices of those on the margins, whose suffering is often invisible, whose voices are easily silenced and dismissed: the unborn, victims of sexual and domestic violence, those with a disability, the sick, the dispossessed, the frail, the aged, refugees, asylum seekers, those suffering mental health issues.

Through prayer, we develop habits of compassionate reflection, helping us recognise attitudes that condemn - attitudes within ourselves, our faith community and our society. Mercy is God's grace poured out on undeserving humanity for no other reason than God's love, not our worthiness. Our task is to show mercy to others, just as God has shown us mercy.<sup>38</sup>

As recipients of God's boundless mercy, we are called to challenge attitudes that condemn those suffering as morally weak or lacking faith. Our eyes are opened to the social determinants of poverty, living conditions and personal security that are amplified by societal structures that exclude<sup>39</sup>. Like the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), we are called not to condemn but to act, to bind up wounds, to pour oil and wine, to ensure ongoing support. Only then does the Church become a 'field hospital,' concerned more with those who suffer than with defending its own interests.

#### **Diocesan resolutions passed at the Synod Assembly:**

- 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.

<sup>37</sup> Fratelli Tutti #68

<sup>38</sup> John W Martens Pope Francis' focus on the Bible and mercy—and why so many Catholics are uncomfortable with it America Magazine 5 January 2024

<sup>39</sup> To Live Life to the Full: Mental Health in Australia Today ACBC Social Justice Statement 2020-2021

**Diocesan response:**

- The Diocese will commit to mapping all current programs and support services that seek to protect the dignity of human life, to identify and address any gaps either directly through the provision of more services or in partnership with other agencies.
- The Diocese, through the Diocesan Journey Working Group, will provide meaningful and accessible opportunities for other agencies and local communities to support refugees.
- The Diocese, through the Mission Enhancement Team (MET) and in dialogue with Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese, the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Deanery Pastoral Councils, will support the establishment of deanery task force(s) to identify the greatest needs of their community to inform the development of pastoral priorities.
- In dialogue with the Diocesan Pastoral Council and Deanery Pastoral Councils, the Mission Enhancement Team will be charged with oversight of research into emerging and effective models of pastoral care, leadership and ministry.

**Local community response:**

*Think Tank sessions will inform this section.*

**Local community reflection and discernment questions:**

1. To deny dignity or lack respect is implicitly violent. How do we make connections between our (often unconscious) attitudes and behaviours and the continuing impact of violence towards ourselves and towards others? What formation do we need if we are to act justly, walk humbly and bring peace?
2. What needs are invisible to us in our community? How do we respond to the realities and needs of those around us? Are we tempted to blame others for their misfortune, e.g. refugees, single mothers?
3. What assistance do we need to identify the greatest needs in our community and so elucidate the assessment of pastoral priorities at the local level?

# THEME 6: A Church walking together

St Oscar Romero said:

*"... wherever there is someone who has been baptised, that is where the church is. There is a prophet there. Let us not hide the talent that God gave us on the day of our baptism and let us truly live the beauty and responsibility of being a prophetic people."*

The Church in Western Sydney is obviously more than the churches, buildings and structures in place, it is the faithful in their day to day activities. The challenge in walking together is to see that the Church is not just when we meet for Mass (important as that is), but all that we say and do.

## **Diocesan resolutions passed at the Synod Assembly:**

- 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.

**Diocesan response:**

- Diocesan agencies will co-develop a range of formation courses available online and/or in person, so that individuals can access suitable formation to ensure they are well supported for the exercise of their ministry.
- Lay, clerical and religious leaders will undertake specific synodal training to encourage these leaders of our Diocese to be ready to fully embrace the challenge and opportunity of a Synodal Church.
- The Diocese will endeavour to have training and reflection days to enhance the understanding of the characteristics of a synodal Church for priests, deacons, seminarians and members of local communities so that the reality of the Church belonging to every baptised person will be strengthened.
- A critical role in the furthering of a Synodal Church is played by the parish, deanery and diocesan pastoral councils. These need to be properly resourced and adequately trained to appreciate and use 'spiritual conversations' and the ongoing activity of leading in a synodal church.
- To review the current functionality of pastoral councils at all levels in the Diocese with the aim of increasing the capacity to work together in a Synodal Church. To identify formation opportunities to build greater collaboration with the leadership of other Diocesan committees and agencies, e.g. Council of Priests.
- The Diocese will dedicate a day, 28 October Vatican II Declaration *Nostra Aetate* Day, where all Diocesan agencies and local faith communities will celebrate with our brothers and sisters of other faiths and pray for continued interfaith and ecumenical dialogue.

**Local community response:**

*Think Tank sessions will inform this section.*

**Local community reflection and discernment questions:**

1. When we talk about walking together, how do we balance the need to 'serve' Catholics but at the same time be open to other Christians and those of other faiths?
2. How can we work more effectively across ministries and agencies in the Diocese, especially Schools and Parishes, acknowledging the need for careful financial independence?
3. How can we better support lay leadership roles in our local communities and the diocese?
4. How can the structures of our local communities better allow for full and active participation of all the people of God now into the future. Acknowledging that this will also need to be extended to the Deanery and Diocesan levels.
5. A Synodal Church cannot exist when unilateral decisions are made without adequate communal consultation and discernment, regardless of who is making the decision. What structures in the local community and training will be necessary to enhance communal decision making for a synodal church?

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