



A GUIDE TO RUNNING A LOCAL THINK TANK SESSION

About this document

This document aims to provide guidance in organising and facilitating Think Tank Sessions for the development of the Diocesan Plan for a Synodal Church. Think Tank sessions will target local leaders, people involved in any ministry, faith formators, and others, to provide recommendations on the implementation of the Diocesan Plan and the Synod resolutions in their local context.

Think Tank Session Goals

1. Honour the call and responsibility of the baptised by inviting their **practical contribution** to the development of our 'Diocesan Plan for a Synodal Church'.
2. Offer local faith communities the opportunity to offer practical feedback on strategies, and ideas for implementation in local contexts.
3. Involve our local faith communities in a collaborative dialogue to provide the Writing Group with valuable perspectives and guidance to inform the development of the Plan.
4. Continue **formation of leaders** and local teams through synodal practices.

The Role of the Coordinating Team

- Lead the organisation and delivery of their local *Think Tank* session with the support and guidance of the Mission Enhancement Team.
- Witness to the vision of a synodal church in the Diocese of Parramatta through their presence, welcome, and listening.
- Strive to personally invite leaders in your local faith community and empower them to be a part of the local Think Tank session.

Target Audience

- Pastoral Council members
- Sacramental Coordinators
- Youth Leaders
- Ministry Teams (Liturgical, Outreach, Welcoming, Music, etc.)
- Prayer Group Leaders
- Parish Priest, Assistant Priests, and Deacons
- Principals, RECs and FIAT Coordinators of Local Schools

Target number of attendees: 15 – 30 participants

Planning Timeline

The following template aims to aid your preparation with your team towards your Think Tank Session.

Week 1	<i>2 weeks prior to Think Tank session</i>
	Meet with Clergy, Pastoral Council (if any) and Synod members (if any) about planning.
	Run through this guide and review video resources with the coordinating team.
	Write invitation list e.g. finance committee, staff, sacramental coordinators, leaders of ministries or prayer groups, liturgical ministers, youth leaders, School Principal/s, etc.
	Choose date, venue, and time of Think Tank Session (between 1 April and 12 June).
	Identify key roles to plan and deliver the Think Tank Session. This may include: Planning Coordinator, MC/Facilitator, Table Leader/s, technical support (audio visual), musicians, timekeeper (<i>see next page for outline of roles</i>).
	Send invitations out.
	In a bulletin / parish announcement - notify the parish that such a process is taking place (<i>Script + PowerPoint template available</i>) OR play the 'Road Ahead' video summarising where we've been, what we're doing and where we hope to go. Repeat in Week 2.
Week 2	<i>1 week prior to Think Tank session</i>
	Meet with the coordinating team to review and run-through the program.
	Allocate and confirm the key roles identified.
	Review RSVPs and identify people who have not yet confirmed attendance.
	Consider pre-allocating participants into table groups so that there is a good mix on each of the tables.
	Finalise items to print and purchase.
	Finalise program requirements, including final version of PowerPoint presentation and handouts.
	Finalise attendee list.
	Send communication to invitees with reminder of details and Pre-Reading Materials (see Appendix A).
On The Day	
	Set up the venue. Small groups of 5 people are recommended per table. Prayer spaces can also be added to the layout.
	Meet with the planning group to check-in and identify any issues for the session that need to be addressed before attendees arrive.
	Practice run of the program with the whole coordinating team.
	Let the Holy Spirit guide the team!
	Start on time and finish on time.

For access to resources, visit www.parracatholic.org/synod

Equipment to Consider

- Projector, Laptop and Audio Speaker
- Chairs
- Tables
- Butcher's Paper (or blank A3 paper), Pens or Markers
- Prayer Space: bible, cross, coloured cloth to represent the liturgical time of year

Think Tank Session Roles

The following are suggested roles for the planning team that will prepare and coordinate your local Think Tank Session. In cases where volunteers are limited, it may be discerned by the team that one person take up two roles. The team may also consider other roles vital to the planning and delivery of the Think Tank Session.

Planning Coordinator

- Leads the coordination of the planning towards the Think Tank Session
- Convenes planning meetings where necessary to ensure communication across all members of the planning team.
- Works with leadership team to identify individuals to invite to the Think Tank Session.
- Sends invitations and tracks RSVPs in the lead up to the Think Tank Session.

MC/Facilitator

- Using the Templates provided in the Think Tank Resource Pack, develops the Script and PowerPoint
- Ensures elements of the session are engaging and clear for people to participate in the process.
- Uses techniques to guide people into prayer, reflection, and action/contribution, with openness and respectful dialogue.
- Ensures that the program is followed and is kept to time.

Table Leaders

- Greets and socialises pre-, during and post-session to create a culture of welcome.
- Assist with the set up and pack up of the session.
- Follow the process of the Think Tank Rounds.
- Creates a safe space and ensures all people are provided an opportunity to speak.
- Writes and collects submissions on behalf of the group.

Technical Support (audio-visual)

- Sets up and ensures the audio-visual equipment is operational.
- Operates the PowerPoint.

Timekeeper (optional)

- Ensures that the program is kept to time, assisting the MC/Facilitator.

Musicians (optional)

- Facilitates prayer and reflection throughout elements of the session with music.

On the Day Schedule

TIME	ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
30 mins	Setup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Audio-Visual setup (laptop, projector, microphones, speakers) ✓ Tables and chairs (5 per table) ✓ Prayer Space <p>Pens, Markers, Note Paper, and Butcher's Paper</p>
10 mins	Introduction	
	<p><i>Script:</i> Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening everyone. Welcome to [local community name]'s Think Tank session. You might be wondering, what exactly is a Think Tank session, and why are we holding one?</p> <p>In October last year, our diocese held its first Synod, which led to the affirmation of 24 resolutions and a synodal decree. Now, our diocese is in the process of developing a 'Diocesan Plan for a Synodal Church' paving a way forward for renewal, transformation and hope in our diocese.</p> <p>Today, with the draft of the Diocesan Plan ready, this Think Tank session gives us all an opportunity to engage in the practice of synodality. We'll discuss how we can practically implement this plan and contribute to shaping the final version, which is scheduled to be launched in August.</p> <p>We listened to our people. We compiled it. We discerned with the people. Bishop declared the fruits of that discernment as resolutions that would guide the plan. And we have now drafted a plan based on the resolutions and input from 200 synod members. Now, we are asking for your input - the people who lead our local communities.</p>	
5 mins	Acknowledgement of Country and Prayer	
5 mins	Summary of Draft Plan (VIDEO)	
10 mins	PRAY Scripture	<p>(Refer to 'Scripture Reflection' Resource)</p> <p>Reflection Question: What part of the Draft Plan connects most with your life experience, and why?</p>
50 mins	Think Tank Rounds	Read section below
	<p>"And now we move onto our 'Think Tank Rounds'. Before we dive into our discussions, let's agree to foster a sense of community and solidarity within our groups. As we engage in this opportunity, let's approach it with respect, openness, and a commitment to seeing Christ in each other.</p> <p>Let's put the needs and best interests of our local communities over our own preferences. Let's listen generously to each other, giving the benefit of the doubt to everyone's words and actions. Let's speak honestly and listen deeply with curiosity another's positions and opinions and ensure that every voice at the table has the opportunity to be heard and contribute.</p> <p>Are we all on board with these principles as we start our discussions?"</p>	

	<p>PRIORITISE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Round 1 (15 minutes): Having considered your local community's context, which ONE resolution across the six themes from the Draft Plan do you personally believe most aligns with your community? <p><i>[Following 10 minutes of discussion, each person writes the resolution on one large sheet of butcher's paper or A3 paper – one per group.]</i></p> <p><i>All sheets of butcher's paper to be stuck to a wall displayed as a gallery.</i></p> <p><i>Participants spend 3 minutes reviewing the resolutions for consideration and discussion at their table group. Participants return to their table group.]</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Round 2 (15 minutes): From what you've read and heard, which resolutions most align with your community's needs? <p><i>[Following 10 minutes of free discussion, each member of the group will write their initials next to THREE resolutions that they believe most resonates with their community and are committed to implementing.]</i></p> <p><i>The Facilitator will review the gallery and identify the TOP THREE resolutions with the most initials. These become the resolutions for discussion in Round 3.]</i></p> <p>PROPOSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Round 3 (20 minutes): Having agreed on the priority resolutions, identify practical responses that your local community can implement. <p><i>[During the 20 minutes of free discussion, the Table Leader should be a scribe to collate into a Group Submission.]</i></p>	
5 mins	What's next? (SLIDE)	As the MC/Facilitator explains the next steps, a volunteer should go around to collect the Group Submission from each table
5 mins	Closing Prayer	
	End	

Training on Facilitating a Think Tank Session

Training sessions are being held at the Bishop Bede Heather Centre, Blacktown from 29 April to 3 May. For more details and to register, visit parracatholic.org/thinktanks.

Collection of Submissions

Group Submissions should be collected from each table, scanned/photographed, and uploaded to parracatholic.org/synod. The Writing Group will consider the submissions collected to finalise the Diocesan Plan for a Synodal Church.

In preparation for our upcoming Think Tank session ...

- 1) Read the **Draft 'Diocesan Plan for a Synodal Church'**
- 2) Consider the following questions:
 - a. What part of the Draft Plan connects most with your life experience, and why?

- b. Having considered your local community's context, which resolutions across the six themes from the Draft Plan do you believe most align with your community's needs?

**Having agreed on the priority resolutions,
identify practical responses that your local community can implement.**

- What does our community already have on offer?
- Where can it increase its focus of energies?

Submit via parracatholic.org/synod