



BEHOLD

I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

Matthew 28:20

Diocese of Parramatta's
Pastoral Plan for a Synodal Church

2024 - 2028

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the traditional caretakers of the lands on which the Diocese of Parramatta sits, the land of the Darug and Gundungurra peoples. We pay our respects to the Aboriginal Elders past, present, and future, for they hold the traditions, memories, and wisdom of this Country.

The Diocese of Parramatta is home to the largest urban population of First Nations peoples in Australia. Therefore, as we launch this Diocesan Pastoral Plan, it is important to acknowledge the wisdom and learning that the First Nations peoples share with us. In 1986, Pope Saint John Paul II declared to our First Nations peoples 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.¹

1. John Paul II, "Address to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Alice Springs," November 29, 1986.

PRAYER FOR THE DIOCESAN PASTORAL PLAN

O God, who always guide Your people on their pilgrim way,
accompany us as we embark upon the path of discipleship
towards greater communion, participation and mission.

Enable us to journey with all people
and lift them up by the hope of a world made new.

Attune our ears to the cry of the earth and the voice of the poor.
Give us new hearts as we respond to the signs of the times
and become more effective instruments of Your Gospel.

Form us into a community of mutual empowerment and credible
witness by deep listening, learning and discernment.

May we all embrace our baptismal call, and enliven Your Church
in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains.

We ask this prayer through Jesus Christ, who is with us 'til the end
of the ages and continues to guide Your Church,
to the fullness of your Kingdom, now and forever.

Amen.

WELCOME FROM THE BISHOP OF PARRAMATTA

Dear sisters and brothers,

As I look back at our historic Diocesan Synod in October 2023, “Behold, I am doing a new thing” (Isaiah 43:19), I am filled with gratitude for the way in which the Holy Spirit empowered us to find common ground and strategic goals despite our divergent views, differing positions, and even conflicting hopes. Together, we have responded boldly to the call of the Holy Spirit through Pope Francis to rebuild and revitalise the Church with renewed discipleship, faithful to our calling as followers of Jesus Christ, as well as being responsive to the signs of the times.

As we move forward with the synodal vision and framework, we commit to becoming a community of listening, discernment, and decision-making that leads us to being a model society and an effective vehicle of the Good News for the disadvantaged, the planet, and all God’s creation.

If the Synod has taught us anything, it is about the cultivation of mutual relationships that consists in respectful and deep listening, mutual trust and learning, and openness to the Holy Spirit. In this way, being synodal is synonymous with being Catholic; it means enacting a circular, symbiotic, co-operative and relational model as that of the Trinity itself.

The spirit of synodality that imbued the Synod Hall in October continued during the listening phase known as “Think Tank” sessions. I am pleased to commend to you The Diocesan Pastoral Plan for a Synodal Church, which has been developed by the whole People of God in the Diocese of Parramatta.

We have great challenges in a secular and even post-Christian society. However, we have the assurance of the Lord who promised to be with us always to the end of time. This consciousness, deepened by our lived experience of the synodal Church, has been the inspiration for the vision and theme for our pastoral plan: “Behold, I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20).

Our journey has only just begun. As we move forward, we endeavour to institutionalise best practice in communal discernment, decision making, and governance, which would enhance the authority of the ordained and the rightful participation of the faithful. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we are strengthened by the encounter with Jesus as we embark on the journey of participation, communion and mission.

Here in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains, I would like to think that our Diocesan Synod has committed us to making synodality a truly constitutive dimension of our local Church and that the seeds we have sown will bear fruit for generations to come. May Mary who listened to God’s Word and acted in sync with the Holy Spirit accompany us on the road of discipleship and witness.



MOST REVEREND VINCENT LONG VAN NGUYEN OFM CONV
Bishop of Parramatta



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SYNODALITY AND THE CALL TO MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

Synodality is a response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and “can be understood as our walking in love and in communion with Christ towards the Kingdom along with the whole of humanity.”² This love, which achieved perfection in Jesus Christ, who lived in intimate relationship with the Father and breathed the Spirit upon his followers, calls all the baptised into missionary discipleship. It is a catalyst for pastoral conversion and renewal within the People of God.

Mary who was the first disciple of Jesus provides a model par excellence. Listening to the will of God and the movement of the Holy Spirit in her life, Mary’s *fiat* brought the incarnate word into being. Her Magnificat ‘proclaims the greatness of the Lord’ and her witness to the life, death and resurrection of her Son reminds all the faithful of the importance of hope and love in their lives. As the People of God, we are called to listen and respond, like Mary, with humility and haste.

The call to missionary discipleship among the faithful “is based on our common baptismal identity and is rooted in the diversity of the contexts in which the Church is present.”³ The context of the Church in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains includes a population comprising 322,448 Catholics rich in cultural and social diversity, five additional practicing Catholic rites, 116,083 families, 19,998 Catholics living with a disability and 21,585 Catholics living alone. Further, the Diocese of Parramatta is home to one of the largest multicultural and multi-faith communities, and the largest urban population of First Nations Peoples in Australia and also to increasing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers.

The synodal journey undertaken in the Diocese of Parramatta has drawn on the experience of our local church. It has been a dynamic process of consultation, listening, and discernment. The People of God have shared their hopes, fears, dreams and anxieties. These have now gained shape and form this Diocesan Pastoral Plan.

The Diocese of Parramatta’s Pastoral Plan for a Synodal Church: Behold, I am with you always (Matthew 28:20) is a call to all the baptised, without exception. It is a call to be agents of the proclamation of the Gospel and to be protagonists of mission.⁴ Throughout the Gospels, Jesus encounters those that society deems the last, the least, and the lost: the Woman at the Well (John 4:1-42), the Blind Man (Mark 8:22-25), and Zacchaeus, the Tax Collector (Luke 19:1-10). In each instance, He communicates the perfect will of the Father, that all should come to the fullness of life through Him (John 10:10). Christ offers a radical counterpoint to the increasingly isolationist, relativist and

divisive narratives of our time. He models leadership through service; power through vulnerability; and love through sacrifice. This is accomplished in His paschal mystery, in which all creation is taken up by Him on the cross, that all creation may share in the fullness of His resurrection. By walking the path of the Gospel and sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus, all the faithful are challenged to “die every day” (1 Corinthians 15:31) that they may become a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), tasked to be light for the world and the salt for the earth (Matthew 5:13-16).

Our Diocesan Pastoral Plan expresses the call to ongoing renewal, both personal and institutional, and offers a practical framework that elevates every person’s baptismal call to missionary discipleship, “answering Jesus’ call to follow Him.”⁵ The task of this pastoral plan is to realise a synodal way of being Church that is humble and constantly in awe by the sacredness of God’s creation. Our pastoral plan invites every person to become co-creators in the building up of the Kingdom of God, surrendering fears and embracing the hope for the future where God’s love is known by all in every generation to come. We take heart, trusting in God who loves us unconditionally and without limits, allowing the words of Jesus Christ to echo in our hearts “Behold, I am with you always.” (Matthew 28:20).

GROWING AS A SYNODAL CHURCH

The word synodality means ‘walking together’ and is an ancient reality, drawn from the early communities of Christian believers. The practice of synods is evident in the writings of the first Christians who gathered in ecclesial assemblies to discern the various doctrinal and pastoral questions of their time.⁶ In the years since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has expressed a renewed commitment to synodality as its *modus vivendi et operandi* (way of living and operating). This being said, “there is still a long way to go in the direction mapped out by the council and a need for some clear theological principles and decisive pastoral orientations.”⁷

Since our 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.”⁸ 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 as well as then-Bishop Anthony Fisher OP 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.⁹

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.”¹⁰ 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.

It is important to remember that in recent years, our Diocese has engaged in many local, national, and international gatherings, consultations, and processes in the spirit of synodality.

2012 – 2013

Diocesan-wide consultations which led to the development of the Pastoral Plan, *Faith in Our Future* 2014 – 2018.

2019

Diocesan forum – *Go Out into the Deep*.

2018 – 2021

Consultations in preparation for the Plenary Council at the invitation of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference resulting in Decrees published in 2022 (pending approval from the Vatican).

2022 – 2023

Consultations in preparation for the Synod of Bishops on Synodality to which Pope Francis invited us to continue ‘walking together’ at a universal level. A synthesis of Diocesan submissions was published in 2022.

2023

Our first Diocesan Synod, which included an extensive listening process and a three day assembly in October.

2024

Diocesan Think Tank sessions for the ongoing preparation and launch of this Pastoral Plan.

AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THIS ENGAGEMENT AND IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE CURRENT THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE ON SYNODALITY, THIS DIOCESAN PASTORAL PLAN HAS ADOPTED THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:

1. THE ACTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit guides the Church on its synodal journey, ensuring it stays true to the teachings of the Gospel of Jesus.¹⁴ The People of God listen together to the Word of God in Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church and then to each other, to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit which guides our human efforts and leads us into deeper communion for our mission in the world.¹⁵

2. COMMON BAPTISM

Baptism is the starting point for our shared mission in the Church.¹¹ Through baptism we become children of God, part of God's family, brothers and sisters in Christ.¹² By virtue of this baptismal call, the faithful share equal responsibility to be active participants in the life and mission of the Church.¹³

3. THE SENSUS FIDEI

The *Sensus Fidei*, or "sense of the faith", is a gift from the Holy Spirit that every believer receives at Baptism, which is strengthened at Confirmation.

This remarkable gift helps the People of God understand what is 'of the faith' - a true statement or expression of faith, when they hear it. The *Sensus Fidei* is recognised in how a person lives, speaks and acts as followers of God. This strong faith helps the People of God recognise God in their lives and to remain hopeful¹⁶. The *Sensus Fidei* means that everyone, not just those with special training or degrees, can recognise true expressions of faith. This is important for a Synodal Church in three ways:

a. Listening to others: The *Sensus Fidei* helps the People of God recognise the truth in what others say, beyond personal opinions or agendas.

b. Decision-making: The Church is not a democracy, so decisions are not necessarily based on majority votes. The *Sensus Fidei* helps groups understand the faith and avoid mistakes.

c. Guidance and infallibility: In the synodal process, bishops play a key role. Along with the official teachings of the Church, the *Sensus Fidei* helps ensure the People of God stay on the right path.

4. THE PEOPLE OF GOD WALKING TOGETHER

A Synodal Church helps all the People of God walk forward together as a pilgrim people.¹⁷ This journey together provides an opportunity for a shared encounter in faith that strengthens the connection with Christ, the Church and each other, both personally and as a community.¹⁸

5. THE DIVERSITY OF GIFTS AND CHARISMS¹⁹

As members of the Body of Christ, those who are baptised and confirmed receive special gifts from the Holy Spirit. With these gifts, the People of God are invited to take part fully in the life of the Church and to participate actively in its mission²⁰. Each person has an important role as the Church works together to spread the faith and grow God's Kingdom.²¹

6. A COMMUNAL SEARCH IN THE WAY FORWARD WHEN MAKING ECCLESIAL DECISIONS²²

A Synodal Church recognises the People of God working together to search for and discern the way forward. The establishment

of synodal structures supports the synodal way of working and decision-making. Bishops play an important role in the Church, but rather than making arbitrary decisions, they and all the ordained along with women and men of faith are invited to listen together to discern the way forward.²³

7. A WAY OF SEEING THE WORLD AND ALL CREATION THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS²⁴

"[To] understand the nature of a Synodal Church in mission, it is indispensable to grasp [its] Trinitarian foundation, and in particular, the inextricable link between the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in human history and the Church." A Synodal Church views the world and all creation through relationships. It is shaped by the Trinitarian relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which connects everything in the boundless love of God.²⁵

10 11. Pope Francis, *Walking Together: The Way of Synodality*, ed. Sr. Natalie Becquart XMCJ (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2021).
12. Synod of Bishops, "Instrumentum Laboris for the First Session," October 2023, no. 20.
13. Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality* (September 2021).
14. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (Vatican, 2018).
15. Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality*.
16. *Second Vatican Council, Lumen gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)*, no. 35.

17. Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality*.
18. Synod of Bishops, "Instrumentum Laboris for the First Session," no. 17.
19. Pope Francis, *Walking Together: The Way of Synodality*.
20. Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality*.
21. Ibid.
22. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*, no. 33.
23. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no. 76.
24. Pope Francis, *Walking Together: The Way of Synodality*.
25. Synod of Bishops, "Instrumentum laboris."

OUR DIOCESAN PASTORAL PLAN FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH

Our Pastoral Plan is the culmination of the first official synodal journey of the Diocese of Parramatta, following the decrees of the fifth Australian Plenary Council in 2022. Bishop Vincent Long convoked the first-ever Synod for the Diocese of Parramatta in 2023, with the intention to follow the invitation of Pope Francis for all baptised people to walk together, or journey with one another in a process of renewal, transformation and hope for our local Church. This Pastoral Plan is an intention and fruit of our synodal journey.

Our Pastoral Plan has been created using the 24 resolutions that were passed at the Synod assembly, which formed the basis of deliberations by many throughout the Diocese during specific Think Tank sessions.

Our Pastoral Plan has two sections: the first being the Diocesan priorities, and the second being a guide for local implementation for our parishes, ministries, and agencies.

WHAT IS A PASTORAL PLAN?

A Pastoral Plan establishes and articulates the Christ-centred vision of our Diocese. It helps our Diocese align its efforts with the Church's mission, meeting the changing needs of the community while staying true to its tradition and pastoral priorities.

A Pastoral Plan involves the commitment of the entire People of God, called to live out their baptismal call in the life of the Church. It provides a common language and the opportunity to focus gifts and resources on the highest priorities as we work together as one Body of Christ.

WHO IS THIS PASTORAL PLAN FOR?

This document is written for the People of God in the Diocese of Parramatta. In particular, it is written for those involved in leading, facilitating, and supporting service, ministry, and mission initiatives within our parishes, schools, agencies, and organisations.

Our Pastoral Plan honours our synodal journey and hopes to inspire local action and equip individuals to engage in the Church's mission, spreading the Gospel message within and beyond the Diocese.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN?

Our Pastoral Plan is designed for a Synodal Church in the Diocese of Parramatta. It seeks to respond to the action of the Holy Spirit, as we, united in prayer and the Word of God, discern and live out the path to 'deeper communion, fuller participation, and a greater openness to fulfilling our mission in the world'.²⁶

Our Pastoral Plan recommends ways to foster a synodal culture and integrate synodal practices into the Diocese's foundation, services and operations. It provides direction and guidance for all within Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains, outlining the resources, initiatives and programs needed to support all people who we accompany.

Our pastoral plan aims to be a living document, that grows and is built upon as we continue on this synodal journey together. Resources and support for implementation are available online and will be developed as we endeavour to be responsive to the needs of our local communities pursuing our common vision to be a Synodal Church in the Diocese of Parramatta.

Visit:
<https://www.parracatholic.org/synodality>



AN OVERVIEW OF THIS DOCUMENT

This Pastoral Plan aims to honour the ongoing journey in our local Church. The six themes from our Diocesan Synod have become the six objectives that underpin this Pastoral Plan.

As demonstrated in the image, the six objectives of our Pastoral Plan cannot be separated from each other and are all integral to our faith and community life lived in mission.

To achieve these objectives, five priorities have been identified:

- Prayer
- Mission
- Formation
- Listening, dialogue and discernment
- Community

As the Church in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains continues to walk this synodal path, we commit to ongoing support and resources to local faith communities and the People of God over the four year implementation of our Pastoral Plan for a Synodal Church (2024 - 2028).

The second section of this document aims to assist parishes, agencies, and ministries to reflect and discern their own priorities in light of the six objectives. Some examples of local community action have been included to inspire creativity and responses toward realising a Synodal Church.



HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

Our Pastoral Plan for a Synodal Church outlines a four year journey for the People of God in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains.

The six objectives communicate the journey of pastoral conversion to be undertaken by the Church in Parramatta. By growing in each of these objectives, Diocesan agencies and communities will come to reflect more fully the form of a Synodal Church. All communities of the faithful in the Diocese will be invited to a continued journey of prayer and discernment around these objectives. Through this discernment they will be encouraged to name practical responses for their community and context. The short reflections, local community discernment questions, and examples to inspire local community action are designed to support individuals and communities to consider each objective and its possibilities for them.

The five priorities outlined in this Pastoral Plan provide a functional framework for action firmly rooted in the identity of a Synodal Church. Each of these priorities reflect, through the various commitments, the voices of the faithful of Parramatta. These priorities are of particular significance for the various agencies of the Diocese who, by virtue of their position, have a special responsibility to ensure the commitments named within this Pastoral Plan are actioned and that appropriate resources are utilised. Local faith communities will be supported to grow in their appreciation and engagement with these priorities through shared implementation strategies and resources to be provided by the Diocese.

The 24 resolutions (see appendix 1) which passed with a two-thirds majority vote have been the basis for the writing process and are reflected in both the objectives and priorities. These resolutions have been the focus of ongoing discussion and reflection via the Think Tank process. Suggestions regarding the practical implementation of these resolutions were gathered along with various other written submissions. This feedback has led to the commitments and practical suggestions outlined in this document.

Appendix 2 provides a glossary of terms used throughout this document. All readers are encouraged to utilise this glossary as they engage with the Pastoral Plan.

Appendix 3 provides a matrix demonstrating an overview of how the 24 resolutions have been mapped to the objectives and priorities.

KEY

- INCLUSIVE AND WELCOMING
- HUMBLE AND HEALING
- LISTENING
- RENEWED IN SPIRIT AND PRAYER
- REACHES TO THE MARGINS
- WALKS TOGETHER



DIOCESAN PRIORITIES

“NOW IT HAPPENED THAT HE WAS IN A CERTAIN PLACE PRAYING, AND ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES SAID: ‘LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY’”

LUKE 11:1

DIOCESAN PRIORITY

PRAYER

As the Diocese of Parramatta progresses towards a Synodal Church, prioritising prayer is crucial. The People of God are enlightened by the Word of God and united in prayer, which is fundamental to discerning the processes that seek God's will and pursue the pathways towards deeper communion, fuller participation, and greater openness to fulfilling our mission in the world.²⁷

IN PURSUIT OF THE SIX SYNODAL OBJECTIVES, THE DIOCESE OF PARRAMATTA COMMITS TO:

- Support opportunities for prayer and renewal through retreats and sabbaticals particularly for key leaders and teams. **4A**
- Encourage and support prayer groups such as Lectio Divina or Lenten Groups. **4A**
- Explore the establishment of a Diocesan retreat house, offering opportunities for retreat, prayer and formation for the community. **4A**
- Increasing opportunities to access: **4C**
 - (a) Eucharistic Adoration by exploring the further establishment of Adoration Chapels or other times for Adoration especially before and after Mass.
 - (b) the Sacrament of Reconciliation by exploring ways to increase availability, especially before and after Sunday Mass.
 - (c) safe spaces in every deanery for prayer, reflection and worship outside of usual hours.
- Deepen our experience and appreciation of the homily as a source of teaching and inspiration. Furthermore, we commit to developing suggestions for best practice and other resources to support quality preparation and delivery, especially for all clergy and seminarians. **4D**
- Create opportunities to pray together as a Diocese for discerned causes. For example, such causes could include those seeking refuge, those who feel alienated from the Church, the distress of Earth, our planet home, dialogue with our sisters and brothers of other faiths or those caught in situations of violence and conflict. Prayer opportunities could include Holy Hours, Lectio Divina, praying the Psalms, Adoration, the Rosary and any number who gather in the name of the Lord, who has promised to be with them (Matthew 18:20). **3B**

“AND HE (THE RISEN JESUS) SAID TO HER (MARY MAGDALENE): ‘GO AND TELL MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS I AM ASCENDING TO MY FATHER AND YOUR FATHER, TO MY GOD AND YOUR GOD. SO, MARY MAGDALENE WENT AND GAVE THE DISCIPLES THIS MESSAGE.’”

JOHN 20:17-18

DIOCESAN PRIORITY

MISSION

As the Diocese moves towards becoming a more Synodal Church, ‘mission’ emphasises that the Church exists to evangelise, that is, to share the Good News. As such, the Church cannot be centred on itself. Its deeply missionary dimension, expressed through commitment to synodality, enables the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially to those on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world.

By prioritising mission, we aim to live out our call to be a sign of God’s love in the midst of the human family, responding to the needs of our time with faith and compassion, and serving as a leaven for the coming of God’s kingdom.²⁸

IN PURSUIT OF THE SIX SYNODAL OBJECTIVES, THE DIOCESE OF PARRAMATTA COMMITS TO:

- Explore options for a dedicated space or centre for youth and young adults for gathering, access to support services, formation, and retreats. **3A**
- Explore support structures which pastorally respond to the needs of all families, in their diverse structures and circumstances. For instance, reimagining and enhancing sacramental programs to engage all families through strengthened faith formation and structures of support and accompaniment. **1D**
- Discern and co-develop an official “Statement of Welcome” to strengthen a culture of welcome that is enriched by and celebrates difference. The “Statement of Welcome” may be utilised by all communities within the Diocese and is displayed prominently across the Diocese. **1A**
- Shift cultural blocks and adapt structures that honour the gifts of all the baptised, women and men, at all levels of leadership within the Diocese. **6C 1C**
- Explore the establishment of ethnic chaplaincies for all significantly represented cultures in our Diocese to better understand diverse cultural expressions of our faith, enabling us to walk together towards deeper communion, fuller participation and greater openness to fulfilling God’s mission in the world. **3C**
- Expand the existing work of the ‘Diocesan Journey Walking with Refugees and People Seeking Protection’ group to find concrete ways to create a culture of welcome, hospitality and meaningful connection for refugees and people seeking asylum. **1B**
- Expand the existing work of the ‘Pastoral Working group’ to find concrete ways to create a culture of welcome, hospitality and meaningful connection for those in the LGBTIQA+ community towards deeper communion and fuller participation in the life and mission of the Church. **1B**
- Support women and families of all structures and provide more equitable leave policies for new parents and carers to help families during challenging periods. **6C**

“SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE,
WE ARE TO GROW UP IN ALL THINGS
IN HIM, CHRIST, WHO IS THE HEAD.”

EPHESIANS 4:15

DIOCESAN PRIORITY

FORMATION

By our baptism, we are made “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Peter 2:9). By our baptism, we are called to share in God’s mission: we are sent by God to proclaim the Gospel by our lives of loving service.

Formation is the invitation to focus our minds and hearts on the person of Jesus Christ, and to grow and develop our gifts so that we can better serve God’s mission. Formation is an intentional, ongoing process, helping us to reflect on our lived experiences, to grow in spiritual awareness and theological understanding.

Formation teaches us ways to discern the movements of the Spirit in, through and among us as we travel our synodal pathways together.

IN PURSUIT OF THE SIX SYNODAL OBJECTIVES, THE DIOCESE OF PARRAMATTA COMMITS TO:

- Educate the People of God about the Eucharist as the source and summit of our faith. **4A**
- The ongoing development of formation in synodal leadership and practices for all who exercise leadership within and across the Diocese. Formation programs will include three synodal modules: Communion, Participation and Mission. **6A 6D**
- Grow our capacity to be a synodal community through embedding synodal practices such as Table Talks and Spiritual Conversations into the practice of each parish, ministry, and agency. **4A**
- Create a spirit of hospitality and welcome for new clergy from overseas and across Australia by providing them with formation and training in local customs, cultures and the diverse and rich tapestry of our Diocese. **1A**
- Work with priests and liturgists to develop liturgical resources that prioritise community engagement and effectively support participation in the liturgy. **4C**
- Work with priests, deacons and adult faith formators to explore and establish formation and training opportunities for enhancing homilies, building towards local ‘best practices’, with guidance provided in *Evangelii Gaudium*. **4D**
- Provide seminarians, clergy and faith leaders with formal studies in interfaith dialogue, recognising that we live in one of the most multicultural and multi-faith dioceses in Australia. **6E**
- Continue partnerships with experts and adult faith formation providers to produce high-quality programs that draw on Biblical studies, diverse Catholic spiritual traditions, Church history, theology, and Catholic social teachings. Emphasising prayer, scripture, and liturgy, we will continue to prioritise face-to-face formation, while also offering virtual options. **4A**
- Sponsor equal numbers of women and men from the Diocese in studies of ecclesiology, theology, models for pastoral care, leadership and ministry. **5D**
- Resource the ongoing expansion of youth ministry across the Diocese with a focus on faith formation and accompaniment towards leadership, service and mission. **3A**
- Promote liturgical training for ministries like lectors and acolytes, with a particular focus on increasing the participation and representation of women in these roles. **4B**
- Ongoing formation in ecological spirituality, which integrates faith with environmental stewardship, learning to live in harmony with creation, and actively working towards the care and preservation of our common home. **3C**

“WERE NOT OUR HEARTS BURNING WITHIN US AS HE TALKED TO US ON THE ROAD AND OPENED THE SCRIPTURES TO US?”

LUKE 24:32

DIOCESAN PRIORITY

LISTENING, DIALOGUE AND DISCERNMENT

One of the key elements of a Synodal Church is the ability to listen and dialogue. True dialogue, if it is to be more than a process of negotiating, requires deep listening. In turn, deep listening requires real humility and openness of mind and heart. These dispositions enable us to be respectfully present to each other and to discern the movements of the Holy Spirit among us. The work of discernment is the discipline of allowing space for the Holy Spirit to prompt us, to lead us to the complete truth (John 16:13).

IN PURSUIT OF THE SIX SYNODAL OBJECTIVES, THE DIOCESE OF PARRAMATTA COMMITS TO:

- Ensure that each parish establishes a Pastoral Council in accordance with the Diocesan guidelines (for Pastoral Councils)²⁹ by the end of 2025. With support from the Diocese to optimise their effectiveness, Parish Pastoral Councils will encourage the participation of the baptised in the life of the parish through the development of a pastoral plan, supported by subcommittees and/or action groups. **6D**
- Review the current functionality of parish, deanery and diocesan pastoral councils to enhance their capacity for collaborative work in a Synodal Church. Take steps to embed in the Church in Parramatta a culture of listening and collaboration as well as good administrative and governance practice. With support and resources, these pastoral councils will identify ways to increase the capacity for ministry, mission, and liturgy at all levels of the Diocese. **6D**
- Support parishes to undertake a pastoral assessment including its synodal structures, and resourcing of key support roles with the aim of identifying ways to increase capacity for ministry, mission, and liturgy. **6D**
- Improve transparency by requiring Pastoral and Finance Councils to report to their parish and deanery. This will expand participation and help identify the support needed in local communities. **6A**
- Promote and resource a variety of ways for young people to increase their involvement in the life and ministry of the Church through greater participation in parish ministry, advocacy programs, policy development, decision-making and diocesan leadership. **3A**
- Host an event that brings the old and young together where they can listen to and learn from each other, sharing joy, energy and wisdom. **3A 5A**
- Recognise the different needs of marginalised groups in our Diocese through listening and dialogue, with a focus on the human dignity of each person, that leads to greater inclusion and participation within our local communities. **1B**
- Continue to resource programs and processes like Listening Circles for healing and support of abuse survivors, and for those enduring violence in their relationships and homes. Develop expressions of deep sorrow and lament at specified liturgical and other gatherings for the grave harm committed against many while in the Church's care. **2A**
- Establish a First Nations Advisory Council, perhaps in partnership with Christians from other churches and communities, to guide and support the ongoing work of reconciliation, healing and dialogue with our First Nations peoples. Potential outcomes include establishing new opportunities or ways to listen to our First Nations People, engaging in truth telling, and developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). **2B 1B 2C**
- Acknowledge major feasts of other faith traditions (e.g. Eid and Diwali) as a gesture of respect and recognition for those who coexist within our local parish communities (e.g. notice in Parish bulletins or announcement before Mass). **6E**

“JUST AS EACH OF US IS MADE UP OF VARIOUS PARTS IN THE ONE BODY, AND THE PARTS DO NOT ALL HAVE THE SAME FUNCTION, SO IN THE SAME WAY, ALL OF US, THOUGH MANY, MAKE UP ONE BODY IN CHRIST, AND ARE ALL JOINED TO ONE ANOTHER. THE GIFTS THAT WE HAVE DIFFER ACCORDING TO THE GRACE THAT WAS GIVEN TO EACH OF US.”

ROMANS 12:4-6

DIOCESAN PRIORITY

COMMUNITY

The Church in Parramatta will embody a pilgrim spirit, committed to communion within and between all groups and ministries, prioritising the participation of all the People of God in her life and work. By working together, we can grow bonds of collaboration and collegiality that will better enable us to be the hands and feet of Christ in our communities.

IN PURSUIT OF THE SIX SYNODAL OBJECTIVES, THE DIOCESE OF PARRAMATTA COMMITS TO:

- Map 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 service or in partnership with other agencies. **5A**
- Strengthen local community access to grants by working with civil partners and ensuring that local leaders are aware of the financial support that is available to them. **2D**
- Support 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. **3A**
- Enhance support services for family counselling, financial assistance, and refugee support programs. **1B 5B**
- The ongoing support of refugees. Guided by the Diocesan Walking with Refugees Steering Group, we will continue to build an inter-agency approach to co-create and deliver ways to address the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. **5B**
- Partner with organisations, like Catholic Care, which provide support at the local level to those experiencing domestic violence and/or violence against women. **1B 1D 5C**
- Celebrate International Day for People with Disabilities (3 December) to raise awareness and honour the needs of people living with disabilities and their families. **1B**
- Aid and support full participation by meeting minimum accessibility requirements across Diocesan properties. **1B**
- Work with First Nations people to help local communities embrace a place-based approach to ecological justice, reconciliation and truth telling. **2B 1B 2C**
- The establishment of a Laudato Si' Action Plan for all large agencies, ministries and companies within the Diocese by the end of 2025, which includes commitment to targets to reduce the ongoing impacts of the ecological crisis. **3B**
- Ensure that voices from our ethnic and migrant chaplaincies, the Diocesan Liturgical Commission, and Diocesan Interfaith Commission are involved in the decision-making processes and are heard on issues dealing with domestic violence, ecology and climate change, and aid for refugees and migrants. **6E 5B**
- Improve technology infrastructure across the Diocese to support better collaboration and communication, cybersecurity, and improve operating efficiencies in local communities to increase capacity in ministry and community engagement. **6B**
- Enhance the digital literacy of local communities by working with experts in digital platforms and digital communications, including social media, to enhance the experience of those working in our Diocese and the communities they serve. **5D**



REFLECTING AND DISCERNING LOCAL COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

This section aims to assist local faith communities to reflect and discern their own priorities in light of the six objectives.

These local community examples will continue to be catalogued and shared more broadly amongst the People of God beyond the launch of the Pastoral Plan.



AN INCLUSIVE AND WELCOMING CHURCH

REFLECTION

As Pope Francis remarked at the Welcoming Ceremony of World Youth Day in Portugal in 2023:

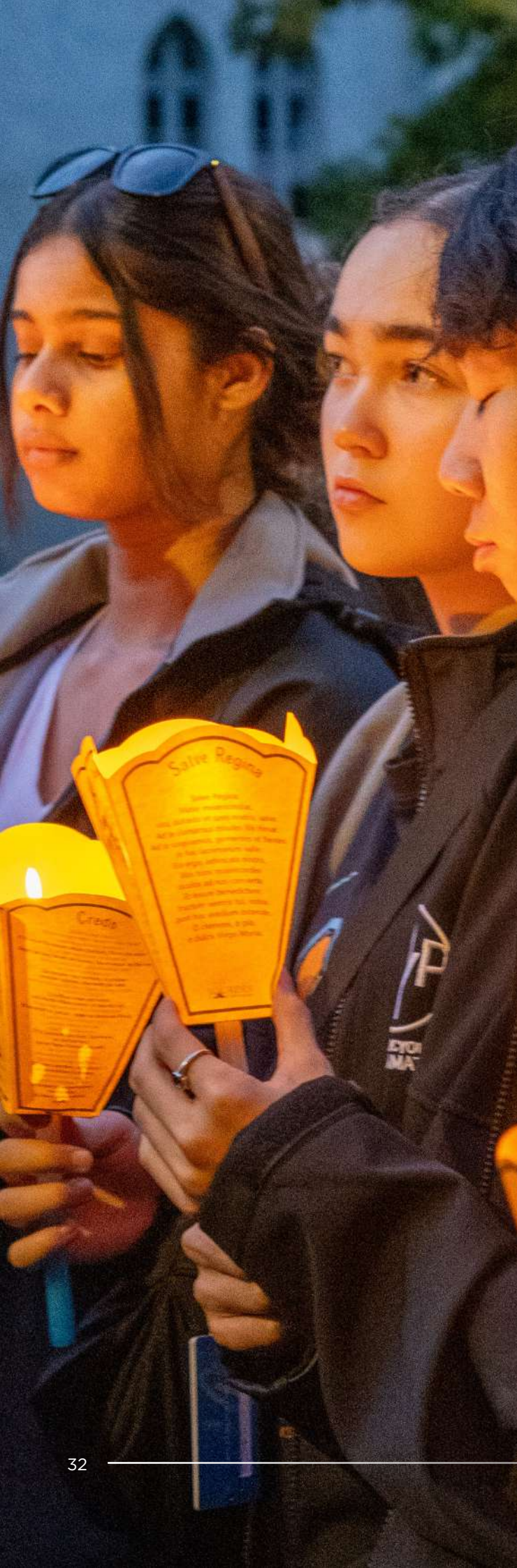
*“In the Church, no one is left out or left over. There is room for everyone. Just the way we are. Everyone. Jesus says this clearly. When he sends the apostles to invite people to the banquet which a man had prepared, he tells them: “Go out and bring in everyone”, young and old, healthy and infirm, 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.”*³⁰

The Pope reminds us of Jesus’ call that everyone is welcome in the Church. 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. We acknowledge that people often live in complex contexts and situations, and thus there are different pathways and different stages of growth in coming to live lives that are faithful to the Gospel. 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 feel welcome in our gatherings? For example, what is the lived experience of a divorced person who feels

alienated from the Church? How do we treat people seeking asylum in our communities? How do we understand the complexities and challenges faced by members of the LGBTQIA+ community who seek greater communion with the Church?

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.

This responsibility does not only rely on priests and the ordained, but to all the People of God, who by virtue of their baptism are called to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church. However, it is important to acknowledge the particular role that leaders, especially priests, have in cultivating a community where all the baptised see themselves as the Body of Christ in the world, and are empowered to use their gifts and talents to build up the community and reach out to others. 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.



LOCAL COMMUNITY 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 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?
4. 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?

EXAMPLES TO INSPIRE LOCAL COMMUNITY ACTION

- Local faith communities to discern and make intentional efforts to create a culture of 'welcome, inclusivity and meaningful community', including in the online space (i.e. social media such as Instagram and Facebook).
- Establish and grow opportunities for small group accompaniment as an entry point for the non-baptised (e.g. family circles, support groups based on 'season of life' or 'life-experience').
- Develop retreat programs and pilgrimage opportunities that focus on the development of a culture of welcome, hospitality and meaningful community; or that help local communities to 'intentionally seek out the gifts and talents' of the community and strengthen communion, participation, and mission.
- Host a 'recruitment drive' to allow the People of God to register and volunteer, so that a database can be created of the people, their skills, talents, and gifts within the local community.
- Apply a talent-mapping framework and process to support succession planning and handover/transitions between leaders/roles.
- Create a team focused on strengthening community and meaningful connection (i.e. event team, outreach team, or welcome team). They could lead initiatives such as 'Name Badge Sunday' or be welcomers as people arrive at Mass.
- Discern ways to emphasise that "all are welcome" at significant events (such as weddings, funerals, or baptisms) that are attended by a wider range of people.
- The official "Statement of Welcome" of the Diocese to be used in local communities - for example permanently published in the weekly bulletin or on the parish website.
- Discern the best form of physical signage to re-emphasise welcome, hospitality and meaningful connection in the foyer of the church, school, and agency facilities.



A HUMBLE AND HEALING CHURCH

REFLECTION

“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”.³²

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. As expressed by the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference *“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”*.³³

We humbly acknowledge the truth of our nation’s founding story and the associated violence and dispossession suffered by First Nations peoples. As St. John Paul II recognised when he addressed the First Nations peoples in Alice Springs: *“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”... 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... for us, you and the values you represent are precious.”*³⁴

We commit to recognising the abuse and violence that takes place in silence or behind closed doors, and find new ways to support and stand in solidarity with those, usually women and children, who are suffering in homes and places that should be safe environments.

As followers of Jesus, we appreciate the Holy 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. Rapidly declining religious affiliation across our country³⁵ is a sign of the times that calls us to step outside the familiar and to engage respectfully with others who do not share our faith or are alienated from formal religion.

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. Our call is to listen deeply, to discern God’s voice, especially in those unexpected or uncomfortable encounters or places. As a synodal community of faith, we commit to dialogue, to build connections with all, believers and non-believers alike, who are working to make our communities better places.

32. Pope Francis, General Audience, April 13, 2016.

33. Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, “Five-year Report on the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse,” August 2023.

34. John Paul II, “Address in Alice Springs,” 1986.

35. Australian Bureau of Statistics. “Religious Affiliation in Australia.” July 4, 2022. Accessed July 25, 2024. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/religious-affiliation-australia>.



LOCAL COMMUNITY DISCERNMENT QUESTIONS

1. How can our faith 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 Action Plan?
3. How do we explore the riches of the many cultures that are represented in our local faith community? How can these enrich our local liturgical celebrations and our prayer together?
4. 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?

EXAMPLES TO INSPIRE LOCAL COMMUNITY ACTION

- Celebrate regular Healing Masses that include special prayers of intercession for those whose trust has been betrayed through abuse or violence as well as ritual gestures that will help all who seek healing in body, mind, and spirit.
- Gather as a community in prayer during NAIDOC Week and extend a special invitation to local First Nations people to attend.
- Ensure the community and its leaders are familiar with Diocesan Safeguarding policies and meeting mandatory training requirements.
- Ensure that good safeguarding practices are included in all ministry formation and training.
- Establish formal relationships with local organisations, like The Shed at Emerton or the Women's Shed at Quakers Hill, for the purpose of supporting their work and providing safe places for activities, like yarning circles.
- Organise opportunities for young people or family groups to participate in bush-walks to learn more about traditional custodians e.g. Kings Tablelands or Red Hand Caves in the Blue Mountains National Park or the Hawkesbury (Dyarubbin) or the Nepean (Yandhai) Rivers.
- Embed the practice of Spiritual Conversations into your community's prayer life as a way to nurture faith, strengthen community, identify possible partnerships in the local area, and to more effectively respond to local needs.
- Provide different experiences for community members to share faith, ask questions, seek clarity, and become better informed.
- Organise a structured listening activity such as Table Talks or Listening Circles as a way of engaging with the marginalised, disengaged or wounded members of the community.



A LISTENING CHURCH

REFLECTION

*"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.'"*³⁶

Building on the magisterial teachings of previous pontiffs, in 2013 Pope Francis released his encyclical letter on ecology and climate, *Laudato Si' On Care For Our Common Home*. The Diocese of Parramatta is blessed with great natural beauty, 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 through fires, floods, and extreme heat.

We are challenged to 'create a new culture'³⁷ characterised by greater awareness of and action towards the care for our common

home. We are called to aspire to be leaders in ecological awareness and justice by reducing waste, consuming energy responsibly, and considering the ongoing consequences of our actions on the environment. Together, we commit to responding to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

Another group that can often be ignored or sidelined are our youth. We are challenged to acknowledge that the young people of the Diocese represent not only her future but also her present. They bring with them a passion for community, mission, justice and a desire to expand their participation within the Church and beyond. We are committed to the *metanoia* which comes from listening to the stories and experiences of young people each uniquely bearing the image of God.



LOCAL COMMUNITY DISCERNMENT QUESTIONS

1. How can our faith 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 elders 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?

EXAMPLES TO INSPIRE LOCAL COMMUNITY ACTION

- Offer the Prayers of the Faithful in the diverse languages spoken by community members to celebrate cultural richness.
- Establish a Youth Group or find ways to expand current youth initiatives in the local community.
- Host a youth listening forum or Table Talk on key issues facing them in their lives.
- Develop ministry opportunities for young people, including social justice initiatives, liturgy, and music groups.
- Employ paid youth ministers to support and nurture the spiritual growth of young people in the community.
- Ensure youth have a voice by including them in Parish Pastoral Councils and School Leadership Teams.
- Host local interfaith and/or ecumenical events such as dinner dances and trivia nights to foster community bonds.
- Implement local Laudato Si' Action Plans or engage with Caritas' Catholic Earthcare initiatives to promote ecological stewardship.
- Utilise parish and school halls as 'cooling centres' during extreme heat to support community members suffering from heat stress.
- Establish community garden programs to encourage sustainable living and strengthen community ties.
- Engage the community in a waste education program focussing on the 7 R's of waste management (reduce, return, re-use, repair, refill, refuse & rot).
- Work with local organisations, such as Vinnies, to organise second-hand clothing sales for the community.
- Organise community events like sausage sizzles as opportunities to gather with people from different backgrounds.



A CHURCH RENEWED IN SPIRIT AND PRAYER

REFLECTION

*"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."*³⁸

From the ancient truism, *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi* (as we worship, so we believe, so we live), we are challenged that liturgy is not just an add-on to our faith lives but an essential expression of it. We recognise the need to continually renew and strengthen our liturgical celebrations so that all the baptised may truly participate in the life of the Church and undertake the missionary role that Christ calls each believer to (Matthew 28:19-20).

Being a Synodal Church challenges all believers to recognise their giftedness and asks them to serve. The Diocese makes a commitment to ensure that everyone is able to exercise their proper roles and ministries within the liturgical celebrations conducted here in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains.

Liturgy and ritual helps each believer to experience God in their day-to-day lives and to be nourished for their faith journey so that they may take up the opportunities presented to witness to the hope that is inside of them.

Part of the challenge is to recognise the truth of St. Thomas Aquinas' phrase: *"Whatever is received is received in the manner of the receiver."* While each believer is challenged to take up the opportunities to witness to their faith, what is more important is to recognise how the listener will receive what is being said or proclaimed. Whether we are reflecting on the homily, the prayers of the faithful or an articulation of the Church's approach to bioethical or moral challenges in our world today, we should give as much attention to how the message will be received as we should give to the content of the message.

This is why our faith communities are so important because it allows us to get to know others and be known ourselves. We can never be satisfied to be passive consumers of faith. Jesus calls us disciples because he invites us to see that liturgy not only nourishes us for our faith journey but points towards our ultimate destination - eternal life. For example, the Eucharist - the bread is broken into many, so that the many may become one. This is why the Second Vatican Council called for liturgical reform to help us align our lives, our liturgy, our rituals, our faith and ultimately our understanding, so that what we do, how we pray may truly inform what we believe and how we live.



LOCAL COMMUNITY 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, 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?

EXAMPLES TO INSPIRE LOCAL COMMUNITY ACTION

- Form a Prayer and Liturgy Committee that will focus on developing the quality and experience of liturgy in your community.
- Develop and facilitate prayer and reflection programs that engage the community and align with the liturgical season of the Church.
- Share online resources which communicate different forms of prayer that communities can explore.
- Engage the community to explore topics that respond to their spiritual and pastoral needs. These can then be incorporated into homilies.
- Establish connections with other community groups to create common opportunities for prayer.
- Invite volunteers to share in leading the community prayer such as the Rosary and Children's Liturgy.
- Introduce programs like Alpha into the community.
- Create opportunities for quiet prayer, Adoration, and Adult Faith Formation.
- Review your community's engagement with the sacramental program and consider how best to invite others into this important element in the life of the Church.
- Encourage local community leaders to attend liturgical formation courses in various ministries.



A CHURCH THAT REACHES TO THE MARGINS

REFLECTION

“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.”³⁹

The Word of God, constantly calls us to notice, to listen, to attend to stories of the vulnerable and those who suffer, often invisible, and whose voices are easily silenced and dismissed, such as the unborn, victims of sexual and domestic violence, those with a disability, the sick, the dispossessed, the frail, aged, refugees, people seeking asylum, and those suffering mental ill-health.

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.⁴⁰

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.⁴¹ 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.

39. Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 68.

40. John W. Martens, “Pope Francis’ Focus on the Bible and Mercy—and Why So Many Catholics Are Uncomfortable with It,” *America Magazine*, January 5, 2024.

41. Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *To Live Life to the Full: Mental Health in Australia Today*, Social Justice Statement 2020-2021.



LOCAL COMMUNITY 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?

EXAMPLES TO INSPIRE LOCAL COMMUNITY ACTION

- Establish a Pastoral Plan for your community which focuses on responding to the needs of the marginalised.
- Establish groups to visit the sick, housebound, and grieving.
- Offer opportunities for older and retired community members to participate in the community through service projects.
- Establish a Social Justice Committee whose members engage in formation around Catholic Social Teaching, and training in how to access resources from other organisations and agencies such as the Sydney Alliance.
- Encourage volunteers for after-school tutoring for migrant children.
- Assign seminarians to work in identified social outreach programs throughout the Diocese.
- Involve others in any process that seeks to identify local needs.
- Become informed about the kinds of services and support programs available locally to people across their lifetime. For example, Catholic Care's Project Elizabeth, Houses to Homes as well as Project Rachel, Pregnancy Help Australia, Palliative Care, Marist 180, chaplaincies, counselling, domestic violence refuges.
- Support existing partnerships (or form new ones) with organisations that are responding to needs. For example, Vinnies, Wayside Chapel, Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Project Rachel.



A CHURCH WALKING TOGETHER

REFLECTION

"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." - St Oscar Romero

As people of faith, we are not called to flee the world, but rather to engage and transform it through the signs of God's presence, which are often found in the midst of human struggles and suffering. Synodality means to walk together: it is a call to be a prophetic people in a world torn by conflict, self-interest, and fragmentation.

Jesus encountered people in the reality of their lives and brought the Good News of God's love for them. With this moment of transformation Jesus asked them to respond to the offer of redemptive love by claiming the freedom of the children of God. Throughout its history the Church continues this saving mission of Jesus by encountering the people of today, offering them the same Good News. Our structures and buildings are important statements of our faith, but the Church is not only found in our buildings but in our encounters.

A Church walking together is prophetic when it reflects unity in diversity, where each member journeys alongside the other, sharing burdens and joys, hopes and sorrows. Recognising that the Spirit speaks through many, challenges are navigated together, and members humbly draw strength from their collective faith and wisdom.

Synodality is built on mutual listening, compassion without judgement, and a desire to understand and even celebrate differences. A synodal faith community knows itself to be imperfect and so fosters respectful listening, especially to the voices that have been marginalised or excluded. In particular, this includes valuing the experiences and insights of women in shaping the Church's mission and priorities.

Guided by the Gospel teachings of Christ, a synodal community is like an "open circle" open to encounter, open to meeting people where they are, open to entering the (often) messy reality of other peoples' lives. To walk with others in this way requires us to 'take off the shoes' that protect us and to become vulnerable, to start the journey without knowing the answers, or even the questions.



LOCAL COMMUNITY 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?

EXAMPLES TO INSPIRE LOCAL COMMUNITY ACTION

- Encourage Pastoral Councils to look to organise prayer and pilgrimage opportunities.
- Include professional development opportunities within existing meetings, especially as formation material is developed.
- Each local faith community will identify the different Diocesan agencies and works in their area and look for ways to increase contact and communication between them all, so that collaboration is more effective.
- Develop a Synodality Checklist to help evaluate how well the local community is undertaking synodality.
- Commit to providing more opportunities for local communities to nominate suitable people to receive scholarships to train as Spiritual Directors to help our Church community members draw closer to God.
- For each Pastoral Council, encourage the assignment of an interfaith portfolio to one or two members, to encourage the participation in and advertising for interfaith formation opportunities and practical ways of carrying out this missionary apostolate.
- Working with other Christian and non-Christian communities to support local charities. For example, nursing homes, craft groups, or the local community garden or kitchen.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

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
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

APPENDIX 2

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Term:	Definition:
Agents	Individuals or groups involved in the Church’s mission, including clergy, religious, and laity, who participate in evangelisation and pastoral activities (<i>Christifideles Laici</i> , 15).
Catalyst	A person or element that quickly brings about significant change or action within the Church’s mission, inspiring renewal and growth (<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> , 27).
Charisms	Special gifts or graces given by the Holy Spirit to individuals for the benefit of the Church and its mission (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 799-801).
Communal	Relating to the Church as a community of believers united in faith and mission (<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , 9).
Communal discernment	Communal discernment is where a group gathers together to discern, through prayer and sharing their personal discernment experience, as they move towards a decision affecting the whole community.
Contemporary Western Culture	The current cultural norms, values, and practices in Western societies, which the Church engages with in its mission (<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> , 4-10).
Decisive Pastoral Orientations	Clear and authoritative directions given by Church leaders to guide pastoral activities and ensure alignment with the Church’s mission and teachings (<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> , 33).
Discernment	Individual discernment involves deep listening to where God is ‘nudging’ me via the inner movement of the Holy Spirit in my mind and especially my heart (cf. Luke 24:32).
Doctrinal	Relating to the official teachings of the Church, especially those concerning faith and morals (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 88).
Dogmatic Constitution	An authoritative teaching document issued by Church councils such as <i>Lumen Gentium</i> from the Second Vatican Council. (Second Vatican Council)
Ecclesial	Relating to the Church and its functions, structures, and activities (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 752).
Ecclesial Assemblies	Gatherings of the faithful for prayer, discussion, and decision-making in the life of the Church, like synods and councils (<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , 9-10).
Evangelii Gaudium	An apostolic exhortation by Pope Francis, focusing on the joy of the Gospel and the call to evangelisation in the modern world (<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> , 1).
Fiat	Mary’s “yes” to God’s will, symbolising obedience and acceptance of God’s plan, used as a model of faith for all Christians (Luke 1:38; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 973).
Fidelity	Faithfulness to God, the Church, and its teachings, reflecting a steadfast commitment to living out the faith (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 144-149).
Incarnate	Referring to God becoming flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, a central belief of the Christian faith (John 1:14; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 461-463).
Infallibility	The gift of the Holy Spirit that ensures the Church, especially the Pope and bishops, are free from error when proclaiming doctrines of faith and morals (<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , 25; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 890-891).
Isolationist	An approach that separates individuals or communities from the broader Church or society, which goes against the Church’s mission of unity and evangelisation (<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> , 89-92).
Laudato Si Action Plan	A structured plan developed for the ongoing conversion needed to transform our outlook and actions to be in accord with the loving presence of God in all reality (ACBC 2021-2022 Social Justice Statement, The Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor, (10)).
Listening Circles	Small group gatherings in the Church to foster dialogue, understanding, and communal discernment through attentive listening and sharing (<i>Instrumentum Laboris</i> for the Synod on Synodality, 70).
Missionary Co-responsibility	The shared responsibility of all members of the Church to participate in and support its mission to spread the Gospel (<i>Redemptoris Missio</i> , 71).

Missionary Discipleship	The call for all baptised Christians to take part in spreading the Gospel and witnessing to Christ in their daily lives (<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> , 119-121).
Model Par Excellence	Refers to Jesus Christ as the perfect example for all Christians to follow in their lives and mission (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 520).
Paschal Mystery	The suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, which are central to Christian faith and celebrated in the liturgy (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 571-573).
Pastoral	Relating to the spiritual care and guidance provided by the Church’s ministers to the faithful (<i>Pastores Dabo Vobis</i> , 57-59).
Pastoral Conversion	A process of change within the Church and its members to become more effective in their pastoral mission, focusing on renewing structures and attitudes (<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> , 25-33).
People of God	All who are baptised: laity, consecrated, and ordained.
Protagonists of Mission	Individuals or groups who take active and leading roles in the Church’s mission of evangelisation, guided by the Holy Spirit (<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> , 120).
Radical Counterpoint	A stance or approach that contrasts sharply with prevailing cultural norms, emphasising the distinctiveness of the Christian message (<i>Veritatis Splendor</i> , 88-89).
Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)	A structured plan developed by the Church to promote reconciliation, justice, and healing, especially in contexts involving historical injustices and marginalised communities (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference).
Relativist	Belief that truth and moral values are not absolute but vary based on perspective or context, which the Church opposes (<i>Veritatis Splendor</i> , 32-33).
Renewal	The process of revitalising the Church’s life and mission, often involving personal and communal conversion and structural changes (<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> , 26-33).
Second Vatican Council	A significant ecumenical council of the Catholic Church held from 1962 to 1965, which brought about numerous reforms and updates to Church practices and doctrines (Second Vatican Council).
Self-communication	The Church’s process of communicating within itself through its members, promoting unity and a deeper understanding of its mission and teachings (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 787-796).
Sensus Fidei	The sense of faith by the whole Church, where all the faithful discern and affirm the truths of faith (<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , 12).
Spiritual Conversations	Dialogues within the Church community that focus on spiritual matters, aimed at deepening faith, understanding, and mutual support (<i>Instrumentum Laboris</i> for the Synod on Synodality, 59).
Synod of Bishops	A gathering of bishops from around the world to discuss and advise the Pope on important issues facing the Church. In the current Synod on Synodality 2021-2024, Pope Francis has expanded the work and related assemblies to include lay women and men as voting members, facilitators and theological ‘experts’.
Synodal Structures	Organisational frameworks within the Church that facilitate participation, dialogue, and decision-making among all members of the Church (Synod of Bishops, <i>Apostolica Sollicitudo</i>).
Table Talks	Informal gatherings around meals where participants engage in meaningful conversations, fostering community and sharing of faith (Acts 2:42-47).
Theological Principles	Foundational beliefs and doctrines that underpin the Church’s teachings and pastoral activities (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 170-171).
Theology of Baptism	The study and understanding of the sacrament of baptism, its significance, and its effects on the individual and the Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1213-1274).
Trinitarian	Relating to the Holy Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — and the relationships within this divine unity (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 232-267).
Universal and Particular	Terms referring to the Catholic Church’s nature of being universal (catholic) and present in specific local communities or dioceses (particular) (<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , 13, 23).

APPENDIX 3

MAPPING OF DIOCESAN COMMITMENTS TO RESOLUTIONS

The tables below indicate the connection between the Diocesan commitments and the Synod resolutions.

Objective:	Prayer	Mission	Formation	Listening, dialogue and discernment	Community
1 - An inclusive and welcoming Church		5	1	1	6
2 - A humble and healing Church				4	4
3 - A listening Church	1	2	2	2	2
4 - A Church renewed in spirit and prayer	5		6		
5 - A Church that reaches to the margins			1	1	6
6 - A Church walking together		2	4	5	2
Resolution:	Prayer	Mission	Formation	Listening, dialogue and discernment	Community
1A. To take active steps to build a culture of welcome, hospitality and meaningful community across the Diocese.		1	1		
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.		2		2	6
1C. To intentionally seek out the gifts and talents of the members of our parishes to strengthen communion, participation, and mission.		1			
1D. To prioritise resources that support parishes and ministry groups in our work with families in all their diverse structures and circumstances.		1			1
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.				1	
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.				1	1
2C. That, in the service of reconciliation, parishes and diocesan agencies discern appropriate ways of acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land.				1	1
2D. That parishes will help build united and harmonious civic communities by working collaboratively with like-minded organisations and individuals for the common good.					1

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.		1	1	2	1
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.	1				1
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.		1	1		
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.	3		3		
4B. To continue preparing and commissioning women and men in various liturgical ministries including lectors and acolytes (<i>Spiritus Domini</i> 2021).			1		
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.	1		1		
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.	1		1		
5A. To strengthen our commitment to respect and protect the dignity of human life, from conception through to old age and natural death.					1
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.					3
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.					1
5D. To engage experts in research, social sciences and organisational best practice in exploring emerging models of pastoral care, leadership and ministry.			1		1
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.			2	1	
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.					1
6C. To provide women with opportunities for mission, formation and education in a variety of leadership roles in the Church, supported by appropriate resources.		2			
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.			1	3	
6E. To continue to promote interfaith and ecumenical dialogue and shared endeavours among our parishes, schools, agencies and ministries.			1	1	1

NOTES

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THANK YOU!

Thank you to all involved in this synodal journey, from the first synodal consultations to the Synod assembly, culminating in this Diocesan Pastoral Plan. This landmark event for our Diocese would not be possible without the honest and prayerful listening, dialogue and discernment from thousands across Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains.

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+Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam



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