



SYNOD 26

DIOCESE OF TOWNSVILLE

Working Document

What is God asking
of us at this time?

JUNE 2026



*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts
of your faithful and kindle in
us the fire of your love.*

*As we journey together
may we hear your call.*

*Teach us the way we must go and
how we are to pursue it, so we may
grow in faith, hope and love.*

*All this we ask of You, in the
communion of the Father and
the Son, forever and ever.*

Amen.

Bishop's Words

As we prepare to gather for our Third Diocesan Synod, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the many people who have already contributed to this important journey. Thank you to those who participated in listening conversations, made submissions, offered feedback, prayed for the Synod and committed themselves to the formation process. Your generosity and wisdom has helped shape the path before us.

We have received a significant amount of material throughout this past year. What emerged was a rich picture of our Diocese: a people of faith who care deeply about their communities, who recognise both the gifts and challenges of our time, and who desire to respond faithfully to where God is leading us.

After prayerfully reflecting on all that was shared, I have discerned three priority areas of focus that I believe are particularly important for our Diocese at this time:

- Towards a Culture of Formation and Spiritual Growth
- Towards a Culture of Accompanying Families with Young Children
- Towards a Culture of Synodality

These themes also resonate strongly with the vision articulated by our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, in his first encyclical, *Magnificent Humanity*. In this encyclical, he challenges us to choose communion over division, encounter over isolation, and hope over fear. As Bishop, my vision is that the outcomes of this Synod will help the people of the Diocese to choose communion, encounter and hope.

This Synod is only the third held by the Diocese since its inception in 1930. In many respects, this gathering is long overdue. It presents a unique opportunity to step back, see the bigger picture and strengthen our commitment to Christ's mission. At a time when both the Church and the world face many challenges, it is also an opportunity to be filled with hope.

I pray that the Synod will deepen our sense that we are moving forward together, with Christ leading us and showing us the way. I hope that, in the spirit of *Magnificent Humanity*, we will come to appreciate more deeply that every person matters and that no one can ever be discarded. May we recognise the dignity of every human life and commit ourselves anew to building communities of faith, compassion and belonging.

Finally, I entrust this Synod to the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, Patroness of our Diocese, and to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. May their love and guidance empower us in our shared service to the world, for the Church exists to evangelise, proclaiming the Good News that Jesus Christ has died, has risen, and will come again.



Most Reverend Timothy J. Harris DD

Bishop of Townsville



A Church on the Journey

Throughout history, the People of God have walked through many seasons of change. We follow a well-worn path in seeking to find, follow and proclaim Christ within the realities of our own time and place. From the earliest Christian communities to the Church in Townsville today, the task of being missionary disciples has never been easy. It has always required boldness and courage, a loving trust in God, strength drawn from relationships, and a willingness to be Christ for others in the world.

Just as each of us journeys through life, so too does the Church, not as an institution, but as the living Body of Christ. Together, we are continually called to respond to the realities of our time and remain open to the Holy Spirit inspiring in us new ways to proclaim the Good News, to serve those in need and to live our shared faith. We are a Pilgrim Church, always in need of renewal.

In recent years, the Synod for a Synodal Church (2021–2024) invited the global Church to reflect more deeply on this journey together and, more specifically, on how we walk with one another in practice. This way of being, known as synodality, calls the Church into deeper communion, greater participation of all the baptised, and a renewed sense of mission. It invites attentiveness to the movements of the Holy Spirit through contemplation, prayerful listening to one another and engagement with the realities of contemporary life.

The Diocese of Townsville has already experienced several important moments of synodal renewal. The 2021 Diocesan Assembly invited communities across the Diocese to reflect on parish life, resulting in common directions for parish renewal, the establishment of Parish Mission Councils, and a renewed focus on the mission of our parishes which has borne real fruit. The Diocese has also participated in the 2022 Australian Plenary Council and the Synod for a Synodal Church, joining Catholics across the nation and the world in prayer, listening and discernment.

These local, national and global experiences are not separate events. Rather, they form part of a single journey of continuous renewal within the Church. The 2026 Townsville Diocesan Synod is a continuation of this. The Synod provides an opportunity for the People of God to gather with our Bishop in prayer, listening and discernment, and to propose concrete ways in which our Diocese might respond faithfully to the opportunities and challenges of this moment.



Snapshot of the Diocese

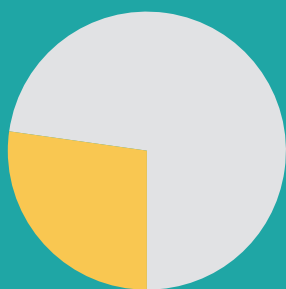
The Diocese of Townsville was established in 1930. It covers an area of 434,400 square kilometres, extending from Townsville on the Coast, to the Whitsunday and Burdekin regions in the South and North to Ingham and Halifax, south-west to Winton, and west to the border with the Northern Territory, encompassing Mount Isa and several small, isolated western towns and east to Palm Island.



PEOPLE

290,000

Total Population



COMMUNITIES WE SERVE

City communities

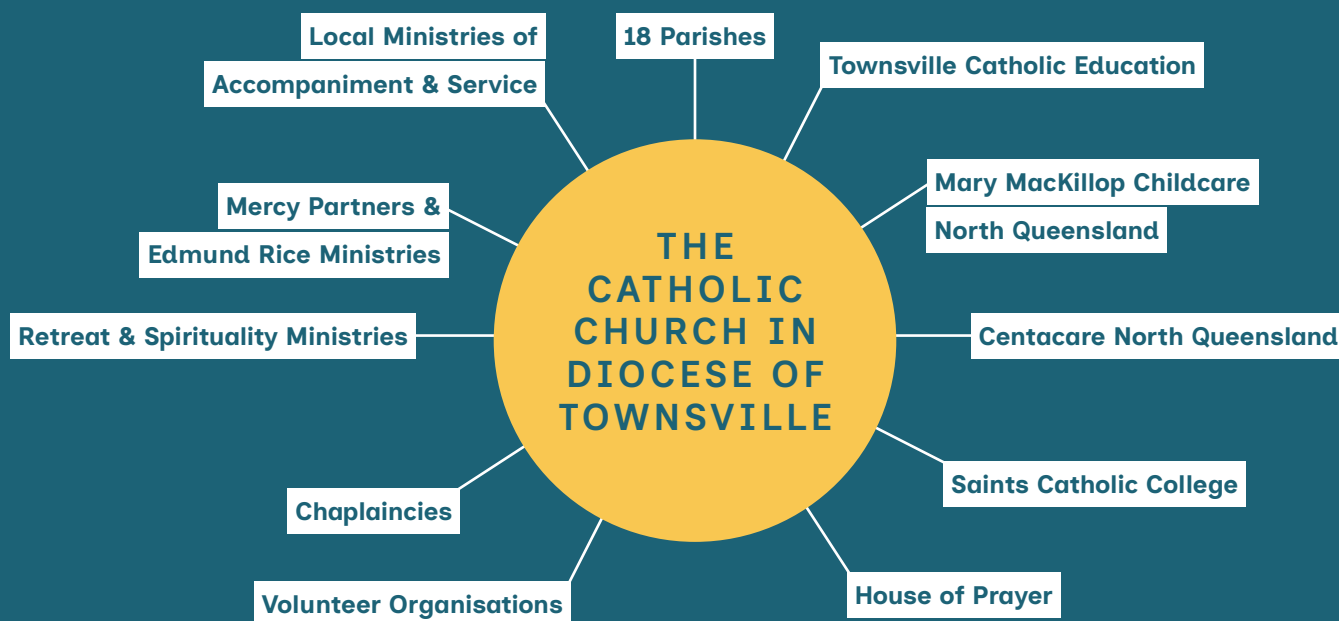
Coastal communities

Regional communities

Rural communities

Remote communities

Indigenous communities



While parish communities remain central to Catholic life, many people now encounter the Church through schools, childcare, chaplaincy, community services, spiritual ministries and works of accompaniment and care.

The 2026 Townsville Diocesan Synod

The 2026 Townsville Diocesan Synod unfolds across five phases: preparation, listening, writing, the Synod gathering itself, and implementation. Each phase contributes to a process of prayerful listening, communal discernment, and shared responsibility for the mission of Christ in our Diocese.

In his Letter of Convocation, Bishop Tim described the purpose of the Synod:

“The Diocesan Synod is a sacred gathering in which clergy, religious, and lay faithful, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, come together to deliberate and discern the ways in which our local Church may more faithfully live out its mission in communion with the universal Church.”

While all the baptised are called to contribute their gifts, wisdom and lived experience, the Bishop retains his unique responsibility for leadership, governance and final discernment.

The insights gathered throughout the Listening Phase were prayerfully considered and discerned, revealing a number of recurring themes across the Diocese. From these seven themes, the Bishop has identified three priority areas for the Synod’s consideration. Drawing on what was heard during the Listening Phase, a number of recommendations have been developed to support their practical expression.

These recommendations are not presented as a finished product, but as the fruit of what has been heard thus far. Through Conversations in the Spirit, Synod members are invited **to listen deeply to one another, test the resonance of these recommendations, identify what may be missing, and contribute their own wisdom and lived experience.** In doing so, Synod members will help discern whether these recommendations reflect where God is calling the Diocese at this time, while also offering insight into how they may be embodied and embedded within the realities of diocesan life.



Listening Phase Process and Summary

The Listening Phase forms the foundation of this Working Document. Everything that follows has emerged from the experiences, hopes, concerns and aspirations shared by people across the Diocese. The priorities and recommendations contained within these pages are not ideas developed in isolation, but the fruit of prayerful listening and discernment among the People of God.

The central question guiding our 2026 Diocesan Synod is:

What is God asking of us at this time?

This question reflects the heart of synodality: trusting that the Holy Spirit speaks through the lived experience of God's people and that we are called to listen together as a Church.

To support reflection, two additional questions were used:

Where do you see life, growth, hope and joy in your community?

Where do you see unmet needs and opportunities in our Diocese?

The first question invited participants to recognise where God is already at work, identifying signs of life, growth and hope within their communities. The second encouraged honest reflection on areas where the Church may be called to grow, respond or renew its mission. Together, these questions helped foster conversations that were hopeful, honest and grounded in gratitude for what already exists.

Listening took place through:

- Conversations in the Spirit with Parish Mission Councils
- Parish and school gatherings
- Ministry consultations
- Focus groups with School communities, Boards and P&Fs
- Online submissions

Over six months, people from across the Diocese shared their reflections, helping to shape a deeper understanding of both the gifts and opportunities present within the local Church.

What follows is a synthesis of the recurring themes that emerged through this process. While no summary can capture every individual contribution, these themes reflect the voices and insights most consistently expressed throughout the Listening Phase.

Key Themes

1

Life, Growth, Hope & Joy

Across the Diocese of Townsville, there is clear and consistent evidence of life, growth, hope, and joy. **These signs are evident across many aspects of diocesan life, including:**

Parish communities experiencing renewal through mission councils and the 2021 parish mission renewal process

Catholic schools as places of quality education, faith in action, and lived values

Diocesan ministries and agencies engaged in education, care, outreach, and social service

Families, children, and young people who bring energy and hope for the future

Moments of encounter through liturgy, sacramental life, and everyday expressions of faith

The presence of God is most often experienced through community: friendships, shared experiences, and spaces where relationships can grow. Across parishes and schools, people spoke of the joy of being known, recognised, and welcomed, as well as the great gift of contributing and serving alongside others.

At the same time, many expressed a lack of deeper connection. Parish life is often experienced as limited to Sunday Mass, without strong relational or communal follow-through. There is a consistent desire for more intentional spaces where people are not only welcomed and known, but accompanied in faith and life.

2

Families & Young People

Young people and children were repeatedly named as sources of joy and hope within the Diocese. Families, especially with young children, are seen as central to the life of the Church and vital to the future of parish communities. Many young people themselves identified their families and communities (school and beyond) as important places of love and connection.

There is, however, a consistent and significant gap in engagement between families and Church life. This includes both parents and young people themselves. Additionally, young adults transitioning out of school, entering the workforce, or beginning family life often feel unsupported during this stage of life.

Across the Diocese, there is a clear pattern of engagement at key sacramental moments (e.g. Baptism and First Communion) without consistent accompaniment beyond them. Families expressed a desire for greater support in living and nurturing faith in everyday life, not only during milestone moments or on a Sunday.

There was also a strong caution raised that the Church must not place the weight of being “the future” solely on young people. Instead, there is a call to walk with them through patient, relational, and intergenerational communities of accompaniment that nurture faith, belonging, and participation over time.

3

Formation & Spiritual Growth

Across the Diocese, many people expressed a longing for deeper faith, greater understanding, and a more personal relationship with God. This desire was shared across different ages, backgrounds, and communities, reflecting a widespread openness to spiritual growth and renewal.

Positive experiences of formation already exist, particularly through small groups, scripture studies and lent/advent reflection groups. However, these opportunities are often limited, inconsistent, or not widely communicated. People want to understand why they believe and practice what they do. Participants

expressed a desire for scripture, theology, and Church teaching to be presented in ways that are engaging, accessible, and connected to everyday life.

While the Mass remains central to Catholic life, many people also spoke of the need to grow in personal prayer and spiritual practice beyond Sunday worship. There was a desire to deepen Christian spirituality and for greater support in connecting faith with daily life, relationships, work, and decision-making.

Overall, there is a clear call for ongoing formation and spiritual enrichment that supports people at every stage of life and faith.

4

Service & Care

There is a strong expectation that the Church be present to those who are vulnerable, marginalised, or experiencing hardship. This includes people facing poverty, loneliness, isolation, migrants and refugees, and those who feel on the edges of both society and Church life. Participants consistently expressed that the Church is called to be a visible sign of compassion, dignity, and practical care within the wider community.

Many examples of this service are already taking place across the Diocese through organisations such as St Vincent de Paul, parish outreach initiatives, school communities, pastoral care ministries, and the quiet generosity of individuals. These acts of care and accompaniment were recognised as important signs of the Gospel being lived out in everyday life.

There is also a desire to strengthen the Church's pastoral presence, particularly among those who feel unseen, forgotten, or disconnected. Participants spoke of the importance of building communities that listen, accompany, and respond with compassion to people in their real circumstances. Service to others is seen not as an optional part of Church life, but as central to the mission and identity of the Church.

5

Invitation & Evangelisation

There is a widespread awareness that the Church has something good, true, and beautiful to offer. Many participants shared stories of personal witness and evangelisation in unique contexts across the Diocese.

Many reflected on the experience of family members, friends, or others who have drifted away from their faith. Some participants also expressed uncertainty about how to deepen and share their own faith with confidence. There is a strong desire to become a more invitational Church, one that actively reaches out to others rather than waiting for them to return.

Participants noted that there is often a lack of visible pathways for people seeking to reconnect with the Church

or grow in discipleship. Many also feel under-equipped to invite others into faith conversations or accompany people who are searching spiritually. This highlighted a need for greater formation, encouragement, and practical support in evangelisation and missionary discipleship.

It is recognised that opportunities for mission and invitation are deeply local and relational. Different communities encounter different people, challenges, and possibilities. Rather than relying on a single approach, there is a desire for communities to respond creatively and confidently to their own context, becoming more visible, welcoming, and engaged as the People of God.



Key Themes

6

Communication & Shared Vision

There is deep appreciation for the committed leaders, volunteers, and communities who sustain parish, school, and agency life across the Diocese. Participants frequently spoke of the good work already taking place and noted that where strong local relationships and connection exist, there is often a corresponding sense of energy, participation, and hope. This was also reflected at a diocesan level, where people expressed a desire for a stronger sense of shared identity, collaboration, and common mission across the whole Diocese.

At the same time, some participants described experiences of disconnection between parishes, schools, agencies, diocesan leadership, and the wider community. Many people shared that they are often unaware of what is happening beyond their immediate local

context, leading to a sense of isolation rather than being part of a broader diocesan journey.

Communication was consistently identified as an important area of opportunity. Participants expressed a desire for communication that goes beyond logistics and announcements, and instead shares stories, celebrates local initiatives, and highlights signs of life, growth, and faith across the Diocese. There was also a strong call for a clearer shared diocesan vision, one that helps people recognise that they are working together toward a common mission and future. Many felt that too much attention is often placed on decline or challenge, rather than acknowledging and celebrating the genuine hope, generosity, and renewal already present within communities, as well as the people who faithfully sustain them.

7

Leadership

Many parish communities rely on a small and ageing group of volunteers who give generously of their time and energy. It is recognised, to continue such good works we need to invite, form, and support new people into leadership and service. This includes clearer pathways for involvement, stronger formation of lay leaders, and intentional succession planning.

There is also a broader call to recognise and affirm the contributions of those who already serve, particularly women, who

have played a significant and often under-recognised role in sustaining the life of the Church. Participation is not only about sharing responsibility, but about fostering a culture of appreciation, affirmation and placing equal value among all the baptised.

Many participants expressed a hope for a Church where leadership and responsibility are shared more broadly, and where all people feel empowered to contribute their gifts to the mission of the Church.

Additional Matters Raised

In addition to the key themes identified above, participants raised a range of other matters reflecting the diversity of experiences across the Diocese. These included liturgy and worship, the sacraments, engagement with contemporary social and ethical issues, reconciliation with First Nations peoples, healing from the impacts of historical sexual abuse, the role and inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making, and the ongoing work of restoring trust and relationships within the Church.

While these did not emerge as major themes across the Diocese, they remain a very important part of the broader discernment of the Synod. Their inclusion acknowledges the value of every contribution and affirms that all voices have been received with respect and attentiveness.

From Listening to Priorities

The themes identified during the Listening Phase reveal a Diocese marked by faith, generosity and hope, while also highlighting areas where further growth and renewal are needed. While all seven themes remain important and are offered to the Diocese for ongoing reflection, it is neither practical nor desirable for a Synod to attempt to address everything at once.

After prayerfully reflecting on what was heard throughout the Listening Phase, Bishop Tim has identified three priority areas for the Synod's consideration. These themes emerged most consistently through listening to the stories, experiences and needs of the People of God and appear to offer the greatest opportunity for strengthening the life and mission of the Diocese at this time.

These three priorities are:

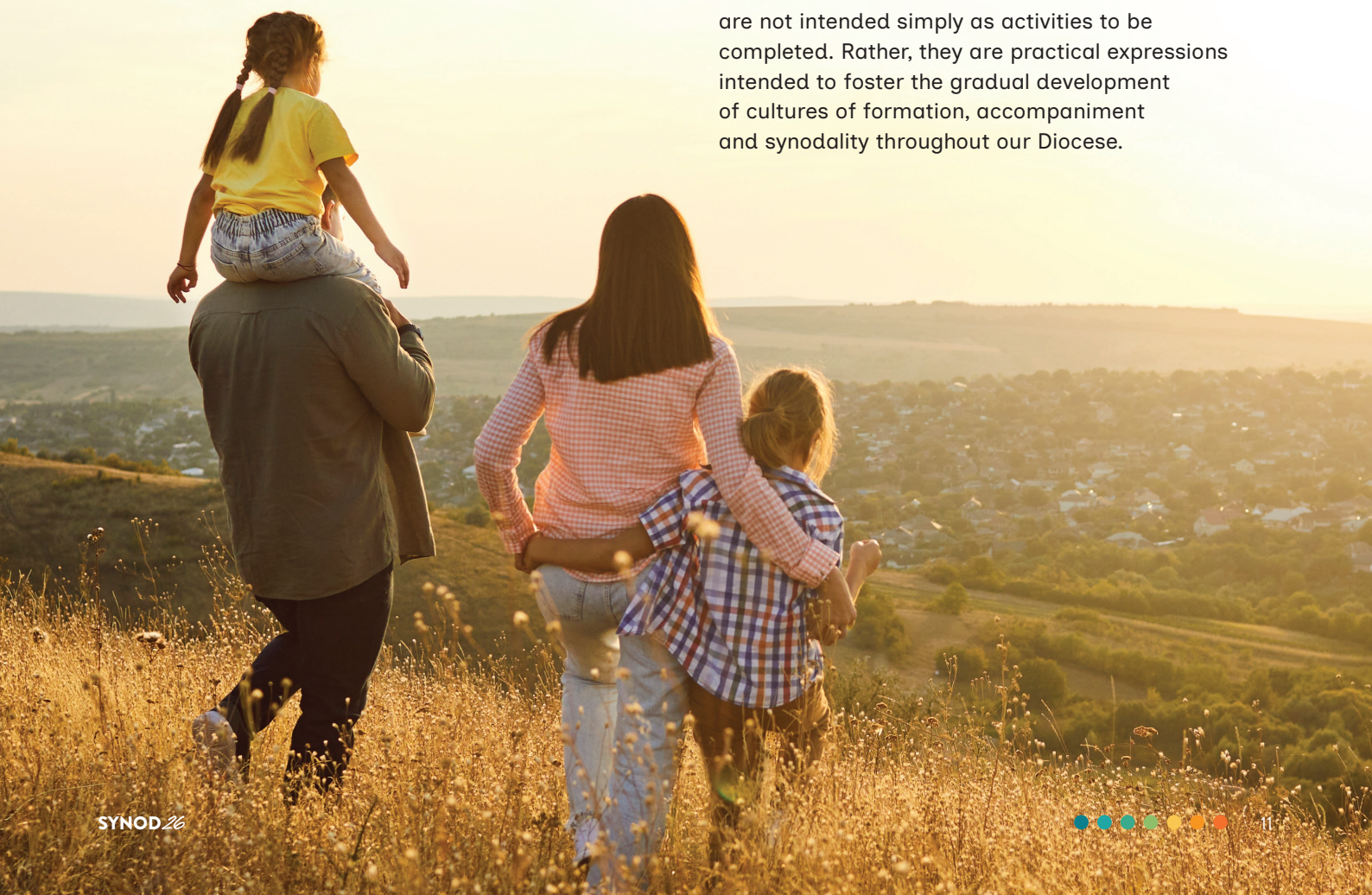
1. Towards a Culture of Formation and Spiritual Growth

2. Towards a Culture of Accompanying Families with Young Children

3. Towards a Culture of Synodality

Each priority is framed as a journey towards a culture. Culture refers to the shared values, attitudes, practices and ways of relating that shape everyday life. While programs, events and initiatives have an important role to play, lasting renewal occurs when ways of thinking, acting and relating become part of the ordinary life of a community.

The recommendations contained in what follows are not intended simply as activities to be completed. Rather, they are practical expressions intended to foster the gradual development of cultures of formation, accompaniment and synodality throughout our Diocese.



Priority One

Towards a Culture of Formation and Spiritual Growth

Prioritising the journey towards a culture of Formation and Spiritual Growth responds to one of the most notable unmet needs and opportunities identified in our Synod Listening Phase.

As noted in What We Heard:

“Across the Diocese, many people expressed a longing for deeper faith, greater understanding, and a more personal relationship with God. This desire was shared across different ages, backgrounds, and communities, reflecting a widespread openness to spiritual growth and renewal.”

A life of faith is not static. As humans, we grow and mature throughout life, including in how we understand our faith and relate to God. While formation includes learning about the faith, it is ultimately about a deeper encounter with Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The fundamental reason why we, as the People of God, do anything ought to be grounded in our relationship with God.

In this light, building a culture of formation and spiritual growth seeks to nurture prayerful, informed and missionary disciples who are able to connect faith with everyday life, relationships and service. It draws upon the richness of Scripture, Catholic spirituality, tradition and liturgical life while recognising that people are also formed through ordinary life, community, reflection, learning and encounter.

Through this priority, the Synod calls for the diocese to foster opportunities for formation and spiritual growth across parishes, agencies and ministries. These opportunities should help people deepen their relationship with God and grow as disciples, while recognising that authentic human connection, shared experience and prayerful reflection can be as formative as formal teaching and instruction.

As a culture of formation and spiritual growth becomes more deeply embedded within diocesan life, it will strengthen communion across our communities and encourage more active participation in the Church's life and mission. This includes participation in parish and diocesan leadership, the celebration of the liturgy, and the missionary outreach to which all the baptised are called.

“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

John 10:10 (NRSV)

Recommendations for discernment

In the journey towards a **Culture of Formation and Spiritual Growth**, the following recommendations are proposed:

1

Undertake a review of formation practices, strategies and resources across the Diocese to identify opportunities for strengthening formation and spiritual growth in its parishes, agencies and ministries.

2

Develop formation resources that assist people to reflect prayerfully on the experiences of everyday life, deepen their relationship with God, and grow in the practice of Christian prayer.

3

Develop a diocesan formation program, delivered through a variety of formats and settings, helping people deepen their faith, understand and articulate Catholic teaching, and interpret their life in the light of the Gospel.

4

Support liturgical formation that deepens participation in the Mass, fosters encounter with Christ in Word and Sacrament, and strengthens the connection between worship and daily life.

Priority Two

Towards a Culture of Accompanying Families with Young Children

Throughout the Listening Phase, families, particularly those with young children, were consistently identified as a source of life, growth, hope and joy within the Diocese. At the same time, there was a clear recognition that many families would benefit from deeper accompaniment, support and connection within the life of the Church.

As expressed in What We Heard:

“There is ... a consistent and significant gap in engagement between families and Church life.”

The Diocese already accompanies families in many ways. Through childcare, kindergartens, schools, outside school hours care, chaplaincy, university accommodation, marriage preparation, counselling and support services, thousands of families encounter the Church each year. These ministries reflect a longstanding commitment to supporting family life and responding to the realities people face. They also remind us that people increasingly encounter the Church not only through parish life, but through education, accompaniment and care.

Family life takes many forms and every family's circumstances are unique. Families experience both great joy and significant challenges, often while navigating competing demands on time, relationships, work and wellbeing. While recognising this diversity, the Synod's focus at this time is on a particular stage of the journey: families with young children. This reflects both what was heard throughout the Listening Phase and the significant opportunity that exists to support parents and caregivers during the early years of family life.

The Church's concern for families is grounded in the example of Jesus himself, who welcomed children and recognised their unique place within the Kingdom of God. Family life remains one of the most significant places where people learn about relationships, belonging and love. For many people it is also the first place where faith is encountered and nurtured. Yet families cannot be expected to carry this responsibility alone. Parents and caregivers often expressed a desire for encouragement, supportive relationships and flexible opportunities to connect with God and nurture faith within the realities of everyday life, not only on Sundays.

Prioritising a culture of accompanying families therefore involves more than providing programs or services. It calls the Diocese to strengthen partnerships between parishes, schools, agencies and ministries; to resource parents, caregivers and grandparents in family spirituality; and to create meaningful opportunities for children and families to encounter Christ and become connected to the life of the Church.

The goal is not simply greater participation in activities, but the cultivation of communities in which families are genuinely welcomed, supported and accompanied. By strengthening relationships during this formative stage of life, we hope to plant seeds that nurture a lifelong relationship with Christ, an enduring sense of belonging within the Church, and a deeper participation in its mission.

Recommendations for discernment

In the journey towards a **Culture of Accompanying Family Life**, the following recommendations are proposed:

1

Promote awareness and accessibility of services, ministries and opportunities available to families with young children across the Diocese, helping them to connect with the support and accompaniment already present within our local Church.

2

Strengthen relationships and collaboration across the Diocese and its parishes, schools, agencies and ministries to better accompany families with young children.

3

Develop accessible, flexible and practical resources and formation opportunities that support parents, caregivers and grandparents in nurturing faith within everyday family life.

4

Strengthen and resource children's ministry and liturgical experiences to help children encounter Christ and participate meaningfully in the life of the Church.

“Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.”

Matthew 19:14 (NRSV)

Priority Three

Towards a Culture of Synodality

Throughout the Listening Phase, people consistently expressed a desire for stronger communication, greater collaboration, a clearer shared vision and more opportunities to participate in the life and mission of the Church. Many also spoke of the importance of leadership formation and of creating pathways through which people can contribute their gifts more fully. These hopes and aspirations resonate strongly with Bishop Tim's desire, when convoking this Synod, to continue fostering a more synodal Church within the Diocese of Townsville.

The Final Document of the Synod on Synodality states:

“Synodality is a path of spiritual renewal and structural reform that enables the Church to be more participatory and missionary so that it can walk with every man and woman, radiating the light of Christ.”

Prioritising a culture of synodality involves more than implementing new structures or processes. It calls for the ongoing development of habits of listening, dialogue, participation and shared discernment throughout the Diocese. It seeks to strengthen relationships across parishes, schools, agencies and ministries, while creating opportunities for people to contribute their gifts and share responsibility for the Church's mission.

Through participatory structures, formation in synodal practices, deepening relationships and intentional collaboration, the Diocese seeks to become a community in which people are listened to, valued and encouraged to participate more fully in the life and mission of the Church.

In committing to this priority, the Diocese continues along a path of spiritual renewal and structural reform, in which participatory bodies become normal rather than exceptional, collaboration becomes habitual rather than occasional, and listening becomes a regular part of diocesan life. Through this gradual cultural change, we seek to become a Church that walks together more faithfully, listens more attentively, and participates more fully in the mission entrusted to us by Christ.

“While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them.”

Luke 24:15 (NRSV)

Recommendations for discernment

In the journey towards a **Culture of Synodality**, the following recommendations are proposed:

1

Strengthen communication across the Diocese to promote awareness of the ministries, initiatives and opportunities already present within our parishes, schools, agencies and ministries.

2

Undertake a review of the Diocese and its parishes, schools, agencies and ministries to reflect on how our structures, practices and relationships are oriented towards Christ's mission and the building up of the Kingdom of God.

3

Develop formation in synodal practices and discernment for priests, lay leaders, educators and the wider People of God to strengthen communion and participation across the Diocese.

4

Establish a Diocesan Pastoral Council that reflects, as far as possible, the diversity of the People of God in the Diocese of Townsville and supports ongoing consultation, discernment and participation in the life and mission of our Diocese, including the implementation of the commitments emerging from this Synod.

5

Commit to a future diocesan gathering (Synod, Assembly or similar) within five years to discern what God is asking of the Diocese at that time and to renew our pastoral priorities in response.

Notes

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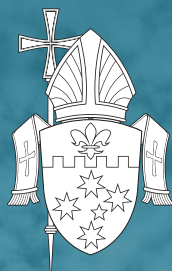
Thank you

We extend our sincere thanks to all who have contributed to this 2026 Synod journey.

We thank especially the members of the Synod Preparatory Commission, Synod facilitators, Synod volunteers, and all who have generously shared their time, gifts and wisdom in preparing for and supporting this process.

We thank the members of the Synod who have committed themselves to prayer, formation and discernment in preparation for this gathering. We are also grateful to the many people across our Diocese who shared their experiences, hopes and aspirations during the Listening Phase.

We commend the Synod, the Diocese of Townsville, and all its people to the care of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians, as we continue this journey of discerning and responding to what God is asking of us at this time.



Catholic Diocese
of Townsville

