



SYNOD 26

DIOCESE OF TOWNSVILLE

Final Document

What is God asking
of us at this time?

INCLUDING THE POST-SYNODAL PASTORAL LETTER
OF BISHOP TIMOTHY J. HARRIS

PROMULGATED FOLLOWING THE SYNOD GATHERING OF 11-13 JUNE 2026
MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS, PATRONESS OF THE DIOCESE, PRAY FOR US

SYNOD PRAYER

*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.

PART ONE

Pastoral Letter, Synodal Decree and Pastoral Commitment of Most Rev Timothy J. Harris Bishop of Townsville

RECEIVING THE COUNSEL OF THE THIRD DIOCESAN
SYNOD OF TOWNSVILLE AND CALLING THE DIOCESE
TO BEGIN THE WORK OF IMPLEMENTATION.

Post-Synodal Pastoral Letter

OF THE MOST REVEREND TIMOTHY J. HARRIS, BISHOP OF TOWNSVILLE. GIVEN AT TOWNSVILLE ON THE SOLEMNITY OF STS PETER AND PAUL, 29 JUNE 2026



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

With deep gratitude to God and a profound sense of hope for the future, I now present to the people of our Diocese the Final Document of the Third Diocesan Synod and invite all of us to begin the important work of its implementation.

When I convoked this Synod, I did so with faith and trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Looking back now, I recognise that it was indeed a leap of faith. Yet that trust has been richly rewarded. Through the generosity, prayerfulness, wisdom and participation of so many people, the Holy Spirit has led us to a Final Document of which I am deeply proud and profoundly grateful.

The Synodal journey has been one of the most inspiring experiences of my episcopal ministry. I have been moved by the sincerity with which people listened to one another, the openness with which experiences were shared, and the genuine desire to discern together what God is asking of us as a diocesan Church.

Our journey began not with meetings and resolutions, but with listening. We listened in our parishes, schools, agencies and ministries. We listened to the young and the old. We listened to those at the heart of the Church's life and to those who stand on its edges. We listened to people whose faith is strong and active, and to those who continue to search for meaning and belonging. We heard many voices, many stories, many hopes and concerns. Those voices are reflected throughout this Final Document.

While a number of significant themes emerged during our discernment, I chose to focus primarily on three that consistently arose across the Diocese and which I believe are foundational for our future:

- Towards a culture of formation and spiritual growth;
- Towards a culture of accompaniment of families and young people;
- Towards a culture of synodality.

These themes did not originate in plans or strategies. They emerged from the lived faith and experience of our people. They are gifts received from the Holy Spirit through the People of God, and I have received them with gratitude, humility and hope.

I wish to thank every person who contributed to this Synodal process. I thank those who participated in listening sessions, submitted reflections, served as delegates, facilitators, organisers and prayer leaders. In a particular way, I thank those who worked closely with me throughout this Synodal journey. Your commitment, generosity and faith have enriched our Diocese and strengthened our shared discernment.

Yet in many respects, the work has only just begun.

If we are serious about the Synod and the call we have heard, implementation must now follow discernment. I am pleased to state that I have accepted in full the recommendations presented to me by the Synod. I firmly believe that our Diocese will be enriched by their implementation and that they provide a clear path for renewing our participation in the mission of Jesus Christ.

Post-Synodal Pastoral Letter (cont.)

For this reason, this Final Document consists of two parts.

Part One contains my own formal act as your Bishop: a Synodal Decree by which I promulgate the Declarations and Directives that give enduring form to what has been discerned, together with a personal statement of commitment.

Part Two contains the Synodal Record. It recounts how we listened, what we heard, and the conversations, hopes and experiences from which these directives emerged.

The Decree signifies my intention that our discernment together should not be left to the enthusiasm of a particular moment. Rather, it is my desire that what has been heard, prayed over and discerned should be sustained, implemented and integrated into the ordinary life of our Diocese. The Decree is therefore intended for the whole Diocese and for every aspect of its life and mission. I encourage you to read both parts together, for behind every directive stands a real person, a real story and a voice that has been heard.

The implementation of these directives will require commitment, resources and patience. In the months ahead, I will be engaging with our diocesan agencies, ministries and entities to ensure that appropriate support is provided for this work. The directives will not be realised overnight. Rather, they will need to be carefully embedded into the ordinary life of our parishes, schools, agencies and ministries.

One of my deepest hopes is that this Synod will help us become a less siloed Diocese and a more collaborative one. We are strongest when we work together. We must learn to share our gifts, resources and wisdom more intentionally so that the whole People of God may flourish. The Church exists only in the name of Jesus Christ and for His mission. It is upon Him that we are built together as one Body, united in faith, hope and love.

For many months we have prayed:

“Come, Holy Spirit. Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it.”

I believe this Final Document offers us precisely that: a way to pursue the mission of Christ within the Diocese of Townsville in our own time and place.

I now commend this Final Document to you. May it inspire us to deeper faith, renewed discipleship and greater missionary courage.

May Mary Help of Christians, Patroness of our Diocese, accompany us on this journey. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be our courage, our strength and our hope.

What a privilege it has been to walk this Synodal path with you. Together, as fellow pilgrims, let us continue the journey with confidence in the One who calls us forward.

Yours in Christ,



Most Rev Timothy James Harris
Bishop of Townsville

Declarations and Directives of the Third Diocesan Synod of Townsville



**PROMULGATED BY THE MOST REV TIMOTHY J. HARRIS,
BISHOP OF TOWNSVILLE | DECREE NO. 2026 / 002**

I, Timothy James Harris, By the Grace and Mercy of God and the Authority of the Apostolic See, Bishop of Townsville,

To all the clergy, religious, and faithful of the Diocese of Townsville, grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Whereas, the diocesan Bishop, in the Diocese entrusted to his care, has all ordinary, proper and immediate power required for the exercise of his pastoral office, and governs the particular Church with legislative, executive and judicial power, exercising legislative power personally (Can. 381 §1; Can. 391 §§1-2); and

Whereas, the diocesan Bishop is bound to teach and shepherd the faithful entrusted to his care, proposing and explaining the truths of faith to be believed and lived, safeguarding the unity and integrity of the faith, moderating the ministry of the Word within the particular Church, and fostering the growth in holiness of the Christian faithful through the sacramental life of the Church (Can. 386 §§1-2; Can. 387; Can. 753; Can. 756 §2); and

Whereas, a diocesan Synod is a gathering of selected priests and other members of the Christian faithful who offer assistance to the diocesan Bishop for the good of the whole diocesan community; and whereas in a diocesan Synod the diocesan Bishop alone is legislator, the other members possessing a consultative vote, and he alone signs the synodal declarations and decrees, which are published by his authority alone (Can. 460; Can. 466); and

Whereas, the Third Diocesan Synod of Townsville was celebrated from 11 to 13 June 2026, following a period of preparation and listening across the Diocese, in which the members of the Synod prayed, listened, discerned and freely discussed the questions proposed to them for the good of the whole diocesan community (Can. 465); and

Whereas, the members of the Synod affirmed the three priority areas and the recommendations presented to them, with implementation notes, by consultative vote;

Accordingly, having listened to the People of God, having received the counsel of the Synod members, and mindful of my responsibility as Bishop, teacher and shepherd of the Diocese of Townsville, I hereby promulgate the following declarations and directives for the Diocese.

These directives are to be implemented according to the general implementation commitment affirmed by the Synod: each priority will require clear responsibility, appropriate resourcing, identified people to carry the work, realistic timeframes, and regular and transparent evaluation and reporting back to the People of God.

General Directive

I direct that, for each of the three priorities, a responsible person or body be named, the necessary human and financial resources be identified, realistic timelines and interim milestones be established, and regular public evaluation and reporting be provided to the People of God.

Declarations and Directives of the Third Diocesan Synod of Townsville (cont.)

Priority One • Towards a Culture of Formation and Spiritual Growth

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

Declaration

I declare that formation in the Diocese of Townsville is to be understood as the intentional deepening of Christian life and discipleship in a living relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not merely the communication of religious information, nor only preparation for sacramental moments. It is a lifelong process of growth, shaped by prayer, Scripture, Catholic teaching, liturgy, service, witness and participation in the mission of the Church.

Directives

- 1.1 I direct that a review of formation practices, strategies and resources be undertaken across the Diocese to identify opportunities for strengthening formation and spiritual growth in its parishes, agencies and ministries.
- 1.2 I direct that formation resources be developed to assist people to reflect prayerfully on the experiences of everyday life, deepen their relationship with God, and grow in the practice of Christian prayer.
- 1.3 I direct that a diocesan formation program be developed and 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.
- 1.4 I direct that liturgical formation be supported and strengthened, so that the People of God may participate more deeply in the Mass, encounter Christ in Word and Sacrament, and connect worship with daily life.

Implementation Directive

I further direct that the implementation of this priority include the formation and support of those who will lead formation; that a clear, shared understanding of what formation means underpin this work; and that formation resources and processes be adaptable, culturally sensitive, suited to local contexts, and serve to make visible and share what is already bearing fruit across the Diocese.

Declarations and Directives of the Third Diocesan Synod of Townsville (cont.)

Priority Two • Towards a Culture of Accompanying Families with Young Children

“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)

Declaration

I declare that families with young children are a gift to the Church and part of the present life of the Diocese. They are to be welcomed in the real circumstances of their lives, with pastoral responses marked by patience, mercy, clarity, practical support and the nearness of Christ.

I further declare that Baptism and sacramental preparation are privileged moments of encounter and invitation, and are to be approached as opportunities for relationship, follow-up, formation and belonging.

I further declare that the protection of children and vulnerable persons is integral to this welcome, and that the safety, dignity and healing of those who have been harmed is a sacred responsibility shared by the whole Diocese.

Directives

- 2.1 I direct that awareness and accessibility of services, ministries and opportunities available to families with young children be promoted across the Diocese, helping them connect with the support and accompaniment already present within our local Church.
- 2.2 I direct that relationships and collaboration be strengthened across the Diocese and its parishes, schools, agencies and ministries, so that families with young children may be better accompanied.
- 2.3 I direct that accessible, flexible and practical resources and formation opportunities be developed to support parents, caregivers and grandparents in nurturing faith within everyday family life.
- 2.4 I direct that children’s ministry and liturgical experiences be strengthened and resourced, so that children may encounter Christ and participate meaningfully in the life of the Church.

Implementation Directive

I further direct that the implementation of this priority encourage parishes to put into practice the Common Directions on welcome and inclusion; that processes and resources be mindful of the shapes of families today, including those whose children are not within Catholic schools or diocesan systems; and that Baptism and sacramental preparation be approached as the beginning of ongoing accompaniment rather than one-off events.

Declarations and Directives of the Third Diocesan Synod of Townsville (cont.)

Priority Three • Towards a Culture of Synodality

“While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them.” (Luke 24:15)

Declaration

I declare that synodality is not an additional program in the life of the Diocese, but a way of being Church: a deepening of our communion in Christ, a participation in which all the baptised share responsibility, and a mission to which we are all sent — listening for the Holy Spirit and discerning together how the Gospel is to be lived in this time and place.

I declare that communication in the Diocese is to be understood not merely as the distribution of information, but as the web of relationships that enables communion, shared learning, transparency, accountability and genuine two-way listening.

Directives

- 3.1 I direct that communication across the Diocese be strengthened to promote awareness of the ministries, initiatives and opportunities already present within our parishes, schools, agencies and ministries.
- 3.2 I direct that a review be undertaken of the Diocese and its parishes, schools, agencies and ministries, reflecting on how our structures, practices and relationships are oriented towards Christ’s mission and the building up of the Kingdom of God.
- 3.3 I direct that formation in synodal practices and discernment be developed for priests, lay leaders, educators and the wider People of God, to strengthen communion and participation across the Diocese.

- 3.4 I direct that a Diocesan Pastoral Council be established to reflect, as far as possible, the diversity of the People of God in the Diocese of Townsville and to support ongoing consultation, discernment and participation in the life and mission of our Diocese, including the implementation of the commitments emerging from this Synod and the evaluation and broad communication of their progress.
I further direct that in establishing the Council, its purpose, membership, relationship to existing councils, authority, reporting obligations and role in implementation are to be clearly defined. Its membership is to be discerned so that, as far as possible, it reflects the breadth of the People of God in the Diocese, including young people, First Nations people, people with disability, people from rural and remote communities, and those at the margins. Members are to have clear pathways for listening to and reporting back to their communities, and membership is not to depend too heavily on any single sector or existing leadership group.
- 3.5 I direct that a future diocesan gathering, whether a Synod, Assembly or similar gathering, be held in five years or less to discern what God is asking of the Diocese at that time and to renew our pastoral priorities in response.

Declarations and Directives of the Third Diocesan Synod of Townsville (cont.)

Priority Three · Towards a Culture of Synodality (cont.)

Implementation Directive

I further direct that, in implementing this priority, communication be practised as genuine two-way listening across parishes, schools, agencies, ministries and diocesan leadership, and that synodal practice be encouraged locally in parishes, schools, agencies and ministries.

Mindful of my responsibility as Diocesan Bishop to shepherd the People of God entrusted to my care, and in accordance with the authority granted to me by the Code of Canon Law, particularly Canons 381 §1, 391 and 466, I promulgate these declarations and directives for the Diocese of Townsville, to take effect from the day of their promulgation, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, 29 June 2026, any contrary prescription of Canon 8 §2 notwithstanding. The directives are to be observed by those to whom they apply; the declarations are to be received as pastoral teaching for the faith and life of the Diocese.

Given at the Seat of the Diocese of Townsville, on the Twenty-Ninth day of June, in the year of our Lord Two Thousand and Twenty-Six.



Most Rev Timothy James Harris
Bishop of Townsville



Rev Damian John Chrysanthus McGrath
Notary

A Statement of Commitment



I make this commitment as your Bishop, receiving what the People of God have discerned in this Synod and giving it a real place in the life and mission of our Diocese.

I commit to keep Jesus Christ at the centre of all that follows, and to formation that leads to a living encounter with him, supporting in a particular way those who will form others.

I commit to families in all their realities, that our parishes, schools, agencies and ministries may be places of genuine welcome, and that the moments when families meet the Church may become opportunities for lasting accompaniment rather than single events.

I commit to a culture of synodality: to listening before deciding, to sharing responsibility, and to communicating in ways that build communion.

I commit to ensuring that responsibility is named, the work is resourced, realistic timeframes are set, and progress is reported back to you honestly and regularly.

I commit to keep faith with those whose voices were not sufficiently present in our Synod gathering, including the young, those at the margins, and those who feel unseen or hurt, and to keep listening with and for them.

And I ask the same of you. These commitments cannot be mine alone, nor the work of diocesan offices alone. I ask every member of our Diocese to take up their own part, in their own place, with patience and generosity.

I make this commitment in humility, knowing we will not do everything well and will need to keep listening and adjusting; and in hope, trusting not in our own strength but in the Holy Spirit, who has led us thus far and will not abandon the work begun in us.

Most Rev Timothy James Harris
Bishop of Townsville



PART TWO

The Synodal Record

AN ACCOUNT OF THE LISTENING, DISCERNMENT
AND CONVERSATIONS OF THE SYNOD, PREPARED BY
THE DIOCESAN SYNOD OFFICE TO ACCOMPANY THE
BISHOP'S SYNODAL DECREE. IT IS NOT A JURIDICAL
TEXT, BUT A RECORD OF THE JOURNEY THAT SHAPED
THE DECLARATIONS AND DIRECTIVES.

Our Synodal Journey

A pilgrim Church, always in need of renewal

The People of God have always walked through seasons of change, seeking to find, follow and proclaim Christ within the realities of their own time and place. The Diocese of Townsville, established in 1930 and covering some 434,400 square kilometres of North Queensland, from the coast to the remote west, from the Whitsundays to Ingham, Mount Isa to Palm Island, has known several recent moments of synodal renewal: the 2021 Diocesan Assembly; participation in the 2022 Australian Plenary Council; and the universal Synod for a Synodal Church (2021-2024). These are not separate events but one continuing journey of renewal, of which this Synod, only the third in the Diocese's history, is the latest stage.

The Synod's Purpose

When our Bishop convoked the Synod, he named three aims: to foster a more synodal Church in the spirit of communion, participation and mission; to revisit the outcomes of the Diocesan Assembly; and to proceed towards the establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council, in accordance with the law of the Church, as an ongoing forum of synodality within the local Church of Townsville. The Synod was therefore not called simply as an event or consultation, but as part of a wider movement towards a more listening, discerning and participatory Diocese that is ever more faithful to the Great Commission.

The Listening Phase

Everything in this document rests on listening. Over six months the Diocese set out to hear the experience, hopes and concerns of its people, in prayer and with care to discern what was being said. People were heard through Conversations in the Spirit with Parish Mission Councils, through parish gatherings and ministry consultations, in our schools from school boards to primary students, among religious and in focus groups, and through online submissions. The aim throughout was to listen across the whole breadth of the People of God. At the centre was one question, the question of the whole Synod:

“What is God asking of us at this time?”

To support reflection, two further questions were asked: Where do you see life, growth, hope and joy in your community? and Where do you see unmet needs and opportunities in our Diocese? Beginning with signs of life, growth, hope and joy, rather than with deficit, set a tone of honesty grounded in gratitude. Because this listening was undertaken afresh, for the Synod itself, our discernment rested on the lived voice of our own people, at this moment in time, rather than on material gathered for other purposes.

Seven themes, three priorities

The listening revealed a Diocese marked by faith, generosity and hope, and named seven recurring themes: life, growth, hope and joy; families and young people; formation and spiritual growth; service and care; invitation and evangelisation; communication and shared vision; and leadership. All seven remain important and continue to be offered to the Diocese for ongoing reflection.

Recognising that a Synod cannot address everything at once, and after prayerful reflection on what had been heard, our Bishop identified three priority areas that emerged consistently from the listening and offered a focused way to strengthen the life and mission of the Diocese at this time:

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

The third priority area, Towards a Culture of Synodality, responded in a particular way to the purpose for which the Synod had been called. Its recommendation concerning a Diocesan Pastoral Council was not a separate administrative matter, but one concrete way of giving ongoing form, within the life and discipline of the Church, to synodal listening, discernment and pastoral counsel in the Diocese.

The Synod gathers

The Synod members gathered over three days. The time available was necessarily limited. Members had travelled from across a vast Diocese, many had to take time away from work and family responsibilities, and priests needed to return to their parishes for weekend Masses.

It opened on **Thursday evening** with Mass. Before the working document was opened or a single recommendation weighed, the assembly gathered to worship. The Synod was declared open not in a meeting but at the altar. A shared meal followed: people found a seat beside someone they did not know, caught up with someone they did, and began, over food, to become the body that would spend the next day and a half listening to one another.

Friday was given to the three priority areas. Each session began with prayer and Scripture, and then moved into a Conversation in the Spirit. Members listened, spoke from their own experience, kept silence, listened again, and sought to notice what the Spirit might be saying through the voices at their table. Each table then provided feedback to the Synod organisers, and time was also given for open sharing, so that table concerns and individual responses could be heard beyond the small-group setting. John 10:9-14 framed the conversation on Towards a Culture of Formation and Spiritual Growth; Matthew 19:13-15 framed the conversation on Towards a Culture of Accompanying Families with Young Children; and Luke 24:13-17, the road to Emmaus, framed the conversation on Towards a Culture of Synodality.

On **Saturday**, the Synod members were invited to listen again to what they had said. Members were presented with a synthesis of the previous day's conversations, including the overarching themes that had emerged, the cautions and tensions that needed to be held, and the common feedback for each of the three priority areas. For each priority, the Synod members then turned from reflection to implementation, asking: What do we need to do to make this priority area a reality in our Diocese?

The recommendations were then presented with implementation notes which sought to honour the table conversations of the previous day and guide the diocese in making the recommendations a reality. Two recommendations had been adjusted in light of the feedback received. A general implementation note across all the recommendations named the need for clear responsibility, appropriate resourcing, identified people to carry the work, realistic timeframes, and regular, transparent evaluation and reporting back to the People of God. Members then indicated their support in three rounds, one for each priority area, by show of hands. The recommendations were affirmed.

The Synod members were then invited to move from diocesan implementation to personal response, reflecting on how each member could help make these priorities a reality in their own life, work or ministry. In this way, the Synod's discernment was not left only at the level of diocesan response, but was entrusted also to the whole People of God, to be lived out in their own places of life, work and ministry.

What We Heard

Across the Friday conversations, the written table feedback and the open-floor contributions converged on several convictions that crossed all three priorities. They are recorded here because they shape how the recommendations are to be read and lived.

- **Encounter with Christ is the measure.** The recommendations, and the way they are implemented, should be evaluated not by whether activity is happening, but by whether they lead people toward Christ, help them grow in prayer and relationship with him, and inspire them to discipleship and mission.
- **Relationships come before programs.** Members returned again and again to welcome, personal invitation, follow-up, mentoring, shared meals, story and ordinary contact outside formal sessions.
- **Know and share what already exists.** A strong appetite to map and celebrate the formation, ministries, initiatives, resources and local strengths already present before building anything new, and to stop working in silos.
- **Communication is communion, not broadcasting.** Members wanted genuine two-way communication that tells the good news already present, makes opportunities visible, and lets wisdom flow between parishes, schools, agencies, ministries and regions.
- **Invest in people; form those who form others.** Priests, lay leaders, educators, volunteers and agency staff all need formation themselves if the priorities are to become a lived culture.
- **The missing voices matter.** Young people, young families, state-school families, First Nations people, culturally diverse communities, rural and remote communities, people with disability, those disconnected from parish life, and those who feel judged or hurt by the Church were named repeatedly.
- **From mapping to action.** There is real support for reflection and review, alongside a clear hope that the Synod leads to visible change and a continuing rhythm of accountability.

Cautions and Tensions

On Friday, alongside genuine hope, members named a number of cautions that ran across all three priorities. These were not, for the most part, objections to the priorities, which were broadly supported. They are recorded here, honestly and without being smoothed away, because members asked that they be held carefully so that the hope of these days bears lasting fruit. They also gave shape to the implementation notes presented with the recommendations, which named the need for responsibility, resourcing, realistic timeframes, evaluation and reporting back to the People of God. In that sense, the declarations and directives set out above, together with their implementation notes, are a response to the hopes and cautions voiced by the Synod members.

The cautions members named are set out below. Most ran across all three priorities; those belonging to a particular priority are gathered at the end.

- **“Will anything actually change?”** This was the single most repeated caution of the day, and it deserves to be named first because it shapes how the recommendations will be received. Members spoke of not wanting to return in a few years to the same conversations with little changed, and asked the practical questions that go with real change: what will we begin, what might we let go of to make room, and how will we know we are making progress?
- **Culture is more than a program.** Each priority is framed as a journey towards a culture. Members were clear that a culture cannot be created by a resource package, a committee or a single event. Formation, family accompaniment and synodality will grow through practices and relationships sustained over time, not through activity or materials alone.

- **Capacity, resourcing and the care of our people.** Members asked openly about the human and financial resources these recommendations will require. There was a particular concern not to lean too heavily on the same generous volunteers who already carry so much, and a desire that those asked to lead be properly formed, supported and resourced rather than simply given more to do.
- **Shared direction without uniformity.** There was support for a common diocesan direction, held together with a clear caution against a single, one-size-fits-all approach. City, coastal, rural and remote communities, First Nations families, culturally diverse families, different ages, stages and languages all need room for local expression within a shared framework.
- **Women in the Church.** Members also recognised the significant and often under-recognised role women have played in sustaining the life of the Church. Alongside this gratitude, a concern was voiced that women’s voices can be present yet not always heard with due seriousness. This is not only a question of representation, but of whether the faith, service, experience and judgement of women are received as a real gift in the discernment and mission of the Diocese.
- **Whose voices are missing?** Members were honest that not everyone affected by the priorities was in the room. They asked how we will reach beyond those already engaged, including young people, young families, those in state schools, First Nations people, culturally diverse communities, rural and remote communities, people with disability, those on the edges of parish life, and those who feel unseen, disconnected from, or judged by the Church, so that our discernment is not only a conversation among the already-committed.

Cautions and Tensions (cont.)

- **Trust, transparency and the role of leadership.** Members hoped this journey would be marked by trust and transparency at every level. This was voiced both as hope and as unease: members wanted consultation to be experienced as genuine collaboration, wanted to understand how ordained and diocesan leadership will live a more synodal way of being, and expressed a hope that leaders and people alike would share openly in this new way of walking and listening together.
- **Fidelity and welcome.** Members did not question that the Church must hold both truth and mercy; they differed about where the greater risk now lies. Some were concerned that a more welcoming and accompanying Church might soften the demands of the Gospel and the call to conversion, and asked that we not lose our nerve in proclaiming the faith. Others were concerned that the Church can still be experienced as rigid, rule-bound or quick to judge, and asked that it learn to meet people more genuinely where they are. The Synod did not need to resolve this tension by choosing one concern over the other: members asked that fidelity and compassion be held together, and that neither be sacrificed to the other.

Cautions specific to each priority were also named: that welcome be real and not only stated; that Baptism and the sacraments become moments of relationship rather than one-off events; and that any Diocesan Pastoral Council be neither an empty committee nor a body without clear purpose, membership, consultative role and reporting pathways. Members also asked, more pointedly, whether our welcome remains real when children are noisy, families are complex, or people come to us feeling judged. These cautions are taken up directly in the implementation notes that follow.

From Discernment to Implementation

On Saturday morning the Synod asked, of each priority, what do we need to do to make these recommendations a reality in our Diocese? One instinct returned across all three conversations: the Diocese will need clear responsibility, real people to carry the work, appropriate funding, visible timelines, and reporting back to the People of God. The commitments that follow give that hope something to stand on.

Five commitments for every priority

Drawing the General Directive of the Decree in Part One of this document into practice, the implementation of each priority will be shaped by five commitments:

1. Responsibility: a clearly named person or group accountable for carrying each priority forward.
2. Resourcing: the people, time and budget required, identified honestly rather than assumed.
3. People to carry the work: identified and supported, with the formation of those who lead it taken seriously.
4. Realistic timeframes: indicative timelines, with interim milestones rather than a single distant deadline.
5. Reporting back: regular, transparent reporting to the People of God on progress against these commitments.

The Diocesan Pastoral Council

The Diocesan Pastoral Council that the Bishop has directed be established is to be more than another committee. While the Code of Canon Law provides for such councils, it matters that the Bishop hear the voice of his people in shaping this one.

Some members cautioned against creating another structure too quickly; others insisted that it must have genuine purpose, authority, representation and accountability. Its purpose, authority, membership, relationship to existing councils and reporting obligations are to be clearly defined; its membership discerned to reflect the breadth of the People of God, including young people, First Nations people, people with disability, rural and remote communities, and those at the margins, and not to depend too heavily on any single sector. Its members are to have clear pathways for listening to, and reporting back to, those communities from which they come, so that the Council serves communion rather than bureaucracy.

Synodality lived locally, and accountable over time

Implementation is not only a diocesan task. Synodal practice is to be encouraged locally, in parishes, schools, agencies and ministries, so that listening, shared discernment and two-way communication become habits of ordinary life. The commitment to a future diocesan gathering in five years or less, with regular interim review and transparent reporting in the meantime, is the Synod's answer to its own deepest caution: we do not wish to be having the same conversations in five years; we wish to be able to show, honestly, what has been done.

How the Priorities Might Take Shape

As Synod members spoke about the three priorities, many moved quickly into the practical question: how might this actually take shape in our parishes, schools, agencies, ministries, families, meetings and wider diocesan life?

The examples that follow are directly drawn from those practical moments in the conversations. They are offered to preserve the concrete imagination of the Synod, not to add further directives. They are not prescribed, nor are they all suitable everywhere. Each community will need to discern what is possible, faithful and fruitful in its own place.

Priority One • Towards a Culture of Formation and Spiritual Growth

- Formation has to be focused towards bringing a person to an encounter with Jesus. It takes time; it takes one-on-one at times. RCIA is a beautiful way of doing it.
- Gather and celebrate what is already working across the Diocese before building anything new. There are rich stories in our parishes; the story needs to be told, shared and celebrated.
- Open school professional development, or recorded access to it afterwards, to the wider parish community.
- Offer a real variety of formats for busy, scattered lives: small groups, mentoring, retreats, podcasts and an online library, with sessions recorded to view later.
- Unpack the Mass and the homily, so people understand what the parts of the Mass mean and can connect Sunday worship with daily life.
- Help people hear how the Gospel is relevant to our lives today, not as a history lesson from 2000 years ago.
- Married couples meeting other married couples: simple space for gathering and connection.
- Let faith-filled people tell their own stories, and the impact faith has had on their lives, as part of formation. We are not good at articulating what we get out of going to church.
- Keep formation contextual, not a cookie-cutter: hold in mind regional communities and those who are not at home in the online world.

Priority Two · Towards a Culture of Accompanying Families with Young Children

- A young-family Mass once a month, and a family service day, to bring the community together.
- Integrate Baptisms into Sunday Mass rather than holding them separately; provide a welcome pack; pair the family with a parishioner who walks with them afterwards.
- Relationships are built over food: parish camps, barbecues, a chair and an esky for lunch after Mass. It does not need to be expensive.
- Children's liturgy that forms rather than just occupies: move it from colouring-in to formation, train the facilitators, and give them an accessible, universal program.
- Change the space sometimes: Mass in the open air with a celebration and activities afterwards that attract young families, such as a parish feast day.
- Ask families what they actually need, and support parents' own encounter with Christ, not only give them tools to teach their children.
- A 'table of eight' sharing a meal with a new family; pairing a parishioner with a family preparing for the sacraments; priests visibly present in schools.
- Reach beyond our systems: intentional outreach to state-school and non-Catholic families, and a regular diocesan word on what is on offer, when and where.
- Children visiting the aged-care home, helping to clean the church, a children's St Vincent de Paul ('Mini Vinnies') group visiting a dementia ward; and Mass times that do not clash with weekend sport.

Priority Three · Towards a Culture of Synodality

- A diocesan website that is actually alive: not just directions, but what each parish is really doing and who to contact, so that good ideas spread. If other people knew about them, they might do them too.
- 'What's our Good News story this week?' as a standing item on every meeting agenda.
- Carry the Conversation in the Spirit into staff and ministry meetings: How do we meet as a staff, as a team, in a synodal way? With yarnning circles and attention to cultural safety.
- Regional or deanery gatherings that meet synodally and feed into the Pastoral Council; revisit the idea of deaneries, or of parish councils in local areas working together.
- A concrete welcome for new priests from overseas: introduce where they are from and what their home parish is like, so parishioners can begin a relationship.
- Name and break down the silos, so parishes, schools and agencies act as one Diocese.
- Use social action, care for creation and Laudato Si', to create space for dialogue that can begin or restore a person's faith journey.
- A cultural fresh-produce stall set up outside the church: people come for it, and now stay for Mass.
- An interim roadmap with milestones and public reporting; and running the synodal process with students and young people next time.

A Church Sent

With the recommendations carried, the Synod's final conversation became more personal. Members were asked: in the spirit of being a synodal Church on mission, how is God inviting me to live these priorities in my own life, ministry or work? The conversation moved from what the Diocese must do to what God is asking of each person. The pattern members kept describing was "from the inside out": to be changed themselves first, and then to carry that change outward.

The movements members named were these:

- **It begins within — a deeper relationship with Christ.** The most consistent note was that living these priorities begins with one's own conversion: to deepen one's personal relationship with Jesus and attend to one's own prayer before anything else, to form oneself in order to form others. Several spoke of Jesus as "the first listener," and of bringing a more reflective, prayerful culture into the busyness of daily life.
- **Listening before fixing — synodality as a personal discipline.** Closely tied to prayer was a striking, repeated humility about listening. Many, especially those in leadership, felt invited to resist the urge to solve and fix, and instead to cultivate genuine listening at staff meetings, in ministry groups, with families, and with the quiet voices easily missed. Synodality, several said, is less a structure to be built than a way of being to be practised personally; silence is helpful.
- **Leading through service, offering my gifts.** A strong sense of servant leadership ran through the responses: to lead by serving, to take personal responsibility for using one's gifts, and to recognise and draw out the gifts of others rather than carry the priorities alone. One table described mission beautifully as "the intersection of needs and gifts and the invitation of God to respond."
- **Welcome and accompaniment — being the face of Jesus.** The language of welcome reappeared here as a deeply personal calling: to be the face of Jesus, to meet people where they are without judgement, and to walk with others toward Christ. Compassionate accompaniment was named concretely too, being present to the lonely, the sick and those in hospital, and walking patiently with the hesitant and the hurting.
- **Reaching beyond — the lost sheep and the unchurched.** Many felt the invitation pressing outward to those not already in the pews, to seek the "lost sheep," to become more openly invitational, and to speak about faith without fear. One table reflected honestly that faith programs do not yet engage people the way junior sport does, with its belonging and sense of membership, and asked how the Church might learn to invite and form with the same care, including better supporting godparents and sponsors.
- **Bridging divides — breaking down my own silos.** Because so many members work in schools, a clear, practical commitment was to bridge the divide between school, parish and agency personally, to make it normal for priests to be on school grounds, and to break down the silos that keep good people working in isolation. The flow runs both ways: inviting families into the faith life of schools and parishes, and sending signs of faith into homes.
- **Bringing it home — beyond the gathering.** A frequent, concrete commitment was not to let the Synod end at the door: to take the recommendations back to parishes, schools and agencies, to meet again to reflect and act, and simply to tell others what happened. One memorable, replicable idea was to make "What's our Good News story this week?" a standing item on meeting agendas, building over a year into real evidence of a synodal journey.

A Church Sent (cont.)

- **Prayer and silence — the ground of it all.**

Beneath every other movement, members named prayer not as an add-on but as the engine of the whole mission. Intentional prayer for the Synod, the Diocese, families and priests was offered directly as the way some are already living these priorities, with a desire to return home changed rather than merely informed, and to live more consciously, day by day, as disciples of Jesus Christ.

One table offered three words to carry forward, and they make a fitting charge for us all: Opportunity, Welcoming, Creativity.

What We Have Learned and Are Learning

A Synod forms us not only through its conclusions but through the experience of walking together. What follows does not claim to represent every participant or every perspective. Rather, it gathers together observations and learnings named during the gathering, reflected upon at table conversations, and noted by members of the Preparatory Commission in the weeks that followed. They are offered humbly, with an eye to the future, so that the Diocese may continue to grow in how it gathers, listens and discerns.

- **Begin with gratitude.** Beginning with the question of where we find life, hope, growth and joy, rather than with our problems, proved genuinely fruitful, and is a pattern worth keeping.
- **The Value of Listening.** The Listening Phase shaped the priority areas, but more importantly, it helped the Diocese take stock of its life and become more attentive to the realities of its communities. Faithful discernment depends on having enough people engaged in genuine listening across the Diocese. The broader and deeper the listening, the more accurately the hopes, needs and culture of our people are represented. Perhaps next time, there is a more strategic approach to invite more into this active listening.
- **Person-to-Person Encounter Matters.** The Synod reaffirmed that there is no substitute for meeting people face to face. Listening is more than collecting responses; it is about relationships and the formation that occurs through encounter itself. Personal contact builds trust, deepens understanding and reminds us that discernment begins with the human person.
- **The Conversation in the Spirit method works.** Members warmly valued the structure of prayer, listening and speaking in turn, and the silence that made room for it. They asked that it be carried into parishes, schools, agencies and ministries, not reserved for diocesan gatherings.
- **Formation works best in small, staggered pieces.** Short packets of content delivered over several weeks, with room to respond, fitted the rhythm of people's lives and prepared members to enter the conversations ready.
- **Prioritising a few areas gives depth.** Choosing three areas, rather than trying to discuss and act on everything at once, allowed deeper reflection and a clearer sense of ownership for what follows.
- **Engage every parish, priest and Mission Council.** Not every parish was drawn into the process as it could have been. It is worth asking honestly whether every priest, and every Parish Mission Council, grasped the significance of what was being undertaken. As pastors of the People of God, priests hold a particular place in commending the Synod to their people, in witnessing to its hope, and in accompanying the members from their own parish. Where that did not happen, synod participation, in its variety of ways, was the weaker for it.
- **Mixed tables build a less divided Diocese.** Seating members with others from different parts of the Diocese, by geography and by ministry, added depth and was itself a first step toward collaboration and the breaking down of silos. Helping people know one another more easily, even briefly at the start, would strengthen this further.

What We Have Learned and Are Learning (cont.)

- **Communicate earlier and more widely.** The account of what the Synod was, and of how the wider People of God might share in the listening phase, did not reach as far as it should have. For many the invitation to accompany the Synod in prayer stayed on the surface. A future process needs plainer and wider communication, so that the whole Diocese knows a Synod is taking place and has a real way in.
- **Centre women in the leading of prayer and discernment.** Women carried much of the work of the two days and were well represented at the tables. Yet in the visible facilitation of the gathering — the leading of prayer, the proclamation of the Word, the introducing of sessions — they were not centred as they should have been. Those who hold so much of parish and diocesan life should be as visible in leading our common prayer and discernment as they are in sustaining it.
- **Include and accompany the young.** Real effort was made to include students and young people in the listening phase, and pathways were opened for young adults to be members. Even so, their voice was repeatedly named as missing — partly because no minors took part in the gathering, and partly because several young adults named as members withdrew before it. That withdrawal is itself a learning about how the young are invited and accompanied, not merely enrolled.
- **Help members commit to the whole process.** The process was built so that the formation fed into the gathering and the makeup of each table carried that preparation into the room. Where members could not take part in all of it — the listening, the formation, the full gathering — that design was weakened. Naming the commitments clearly at the point of invitation would help.
- **Give the work more time.** The size and spread of the Diocese allowed only a single day-and-a-half gathering. Time was precious; the method had to be learned quickly, and the first day's fruits had to be gathered and given back at speed, without the depth more time would have allowed. Members asked for more time at the tables, where much of the real listening happened.
- **Keep widening the circle, and keep the conversation going locally.** The instinct to attend to who is not yet in the room was confirmed by what members wrote afterwards. They named, in particular, Catholics no longer connected to a parish, ordinary parishioners who quietly hold parish life together, those served by our agencies, Indigenous and elderly members, and people carrying wounds from the Church. Members also committed to feeding back to their own communities and asked for the means to continue the conversation locally. Both belong to every future gathering.
- **Practise stewardship at the table.** The hospitality was generous and rightly praised. But the amount of food and perceived waste troubled some. A future gathering might cater more simply, communicate where leftovers are being used and ask how any money saved might be utilised.
- **Make clear that what is brought for discernment is genuinely open.** Some members were unsure whether the recommendations brought to the floor were truly open. The care taken to present them well — including printing them on good paper — was read by a few as a sign that the decisions had already been made. A future gathering should leave time to weigh the recommendations as a body, and should make unmistakably clear that they remain open.

What We Have Learned and Are Learning (cont.)

- **Worship and hospitality shape discernment.** Beginning with Mass and a shared meal was not incidental. It helped the Synod gather first as the Body of Christ, not simply as delegates around an agenda. Future gatherings should continue to begin from prayer, worship and genuine hospitality, while practising good stewardship in how that hospitality is offered.
- **Personal response belongs to the process.** The final conversation, asking how God was inviting each person to live the priorities in their own life, ministry or work, proved important. It moved the Synod from diocesan implementation to personal conversion and shared responsibility. Future gatherings should preserve this movement, so that discernment does not end only with recommendations but with a call to discipleship.
- **Leadership must model the synodal culture.** Synodality will be trusted only if it is visibly practised by those who lead. Future processes should help the Bishop, priests, diocesan leaders, Parish Mission Councils and ministry leaders to model listening, transparency, shared discernment and accountability, not merely ask these things of others.

- **Members need help to bring the Synod home.** Those who take part in a diocesan gathering need simple tools to share the experience locally: a clear summary, questions for Parish Mission Councils, guidance for Conversation in the Spirit, and visible next steps. A Synod continues to bear fruit when members are equipped to return to their own communities and keep the conversation alive.
- **Practical accessibility serves participation.** Small practical matters can affect the quality of listening: clear name tags, microphones, accessible spaces, seating, introductions and simple ways for people to know who is at their table. These are not merely logistics; they help people participate with confidence and dignity.

Recommendation. That these learnings be held by the Diocesan Pastoral Council and consulted in the planning of the next synodal gathering and the listening that precedes it; and that the Conversation in the Spirit be adopted as the ordinary manner of listening and discernment in the parishes, schools, agencies and ministries of the Diocese.

Where to From Here?

It would be less than honest to close this document as though the work were complete. In truth, we stand at the very beginning of the implementation phase. There is much we cannot yet say, because it will become clear only as we begin, and as we keep listening.

We are at the beginning, not the end

A Synod bears its fruit not on paper but in the slow, ordinary work of conversion and cultural renewal. The recommendations were to set a direction; the path itself will be found in the walking, and only in walking it together. We should not expect a finished plan, nor mistake the affirmation of recommendations for the change they call for.

Implementation must remain synodal

What comes next must be undertaken in the same spirit in which it was discerned: through continued listening and through ongoing prayer and discernment. We will not get everything right the first time. We will need to test, to learn and to adjust, and we ask patience of one another as we do.

A word about expectations

Not everything can happen at once, and not everything can happen quickly. The people, time and resources available to us are real and finite, and some hopes will take years to realise, or will look different in practice from how they appeared in aspiration. This is not a failure of will but the ordinary shape of cultural change, which is patient by nature.

This belongs to each of us

These priorities are not a program that “the Diocese” will deliver to the rest of us. Ultimately, they are an invitation addressed to each of us personally. The Synod has awakened responsibility; whether it bears fruit depends on whether each of us takes up our own part, in our own parish, our own place of work or ministry, our own circle of family and friends and in our own hearts and lives. It is not just a work to be done elsewhere; it is a work entrusted to each of us.

In humility and hope

And so we go forward humbly, aware of our limits and of the times we have fallen short before, yet full of hope, knowing that this work is God’s before it is ours, and trusting the Holy Spirit to lead us and to supply whatever we lack.

With Gratitude

This Synod has been carried by many hands, many voices and much quiet prayer.

We give thanks for all who took part in the listening that prepared the way: parishioners, school communities, agencies, ministries, Parish Mission Councils, focus groups, families, young people, religious, clergy and lay faithful across the Diocese. We thank those who gathered in person, those who contributed online or in writing, and those who spoke from the ordinary experience of faith, service, hope, fatigue, longing and love for the Church.

We give thanks for the Synod members who travelled from across our vast Diocese, who took time from family, work, ministry and parish responsibilities, and who entered the conversations with seriousness and generosity. We thank those who encouraged, those who questioned, those who cautioned, those who dissented, and those who spoke as lone voices. Their contribution helped the Synod listen more truthfully.

We thank those who carried the work behind the scenes: the preparatory commission, the table facilitators, scribes, note-takers, organisers, administrators, musicians, liturgical ministers, hospitality teams, technical support and all who helped gather, collate and return what was heard.

We acknowledge with particular gratitude Brother David Hall fms for his facilitation of the Synod gathering and for the wisdom he offered along the way. We also thank St Patrick's College for making its facilities available and for the generous assistance given before and during the Synod.

We remember with gratitude the many ordinary parishioners who prayed the Synod Prayer at Sunday Mass, in parish gatherings, in schools, in homes and in their own daily prayer. Much of the Synod's work was unseen, but not unimportant.

We also acknowledge those whose voices were not sufficiently present, and those whose experience of the Church has been marked by hurt, distance or disappointment. The work ahead must keep listening for and with them.

Finally, we give thanks for our Bishop, who convoked the Synod and entrusted the Diocese to a genuine process of listening, prayer and discernment. He trusted the People of God, trusted the work of the Holy Spirit among them, and received the fruits of that discernment in setting the path now before the Diocese.

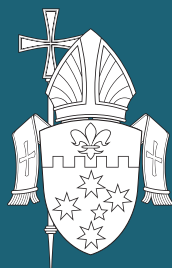
For all that has been given, for all that has been entrusted to us, and for all that the Holy Spirit may yet bring to birth, we give thanks.

Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us.



*Come, Holy Spirit.
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.*



Catholic Diocese
of Townsville