



Catholic Diocese of Townsville

Diocesan Synod 2025 – 2026

Preamble:

Since becoming Bishop of the Diocese of Townsville in May 2017, I have come to appreciate its many strengths and challenges. This is not surprising. Every Diocese faces its own unique challenges and has its own unique strengths. Every year brings new challenges and God constantly grants us new graces to face them.

The history of this Diocese, from its foundation in 1930, and indeed from before, testifies to a long tradition of strengths and challenges. Every time I return to John Maguire's *Prologue* I discover new stories of such strengths and challenges. This historical record cannot be underestimated as a source for ongoing edification and encouragement.

Our Diocese is 434,000 square kilometres extending from Townsville City south through the Burdekin, Bowen and Whitsunday regions, north to the Hinchinbrook Shire, west through Charters Towers and the small communities of Hughenden, Richmond, Julia Creek, Cloncurry and Winton to Mt Isa and the border with the Northern Territory, and east to the communities who reside on Palm Island and Magnetic Island.

There are approximately 290,000 people within the Diocese with a Catholic population of 80,000. Our Parishes have in recent times, as the result of practical realities, local discernment and a canonical process, been reduced in number. Pastoral planning and consultation have been accelerated within a context of assisting our Diocese and Parishes to become fit for mission. An emphasis on evangelisation has been promoted with a call to become a more outward looking Church.

My desire is for the Diocese to be ever more faithful to the Great Commission – to go into the world to make disciples. Every time our Catholic community gathers at the Table of the Lord it should, both as a community and as individuals, have a true sense of being commissioned by the Lord to return to the world to love and serve Him in those whom we encounter.

Within this context, our pastoral strategies and activities need to be constantly reviewed to determine whether they are placing our people on a mission-footing. New strategies and activities need to be developed to help our communities to be faithful to the Great Commission. Gathering people on a Sunday to celebrate word and sacrament must lead to a renewed sense of actually 'doing something' with the faith we publicly profess within the liturgy, as must all of our pastoral activities.

As I contemplate going forward together in faith, I wish to better understand the needs and concerns of our local Church of Townsville. Guided by the recent Synod gatherings in Rome, in 2023 and 2024, the Diocese of Townsville needs to commit to: deeper listening to, and discernment among, all the people of God; promoting co-responsibility in leadership; and embracing the call to be a more inclusive missionary and a spirit-led community. To do this we must develop forums and processes for listening and dialogue. In present 'speak', what synodal mechanisms need to be in place for the Diocese to function to its full potential?

I cannot 'govern' alone in the sense of solely having all the answers. Our recent Diocesan Assembly gave us some focus as did the Australian Plenary Council. Our own initiative 'Becoming New in Christ' has borne fruit but there is more to do. More recently, the Synod Conclusions in Rome have been provided to us to assist our efforts.

I have appointed a Vicar for Parish Vitality and Mission in the hope that he becomes a point of reference. He is to be of service to the Diocese and its Parishes. I am pleased that many have already sought assistance from the Vicar and I understand he has been responding and engaging in the task assigned to him. As the 'name' suggests – Vitality and Mission is necessary for our parishes and the Diocese to thrive.

Considering these observations and after consultation with the Council of Priests (Can 461.1) and the College of Consultors, I have decided to convoke a Diocesan Synod with the three aims:

1. To foster a more synodal Church in the spirit of communion, participation and mission.
2. To revisit the Diocesan Assembly outcomes and identified foci to either reaffirm those outcomes, add to them or to change them.
3. To proceed to establish a Diocesan Pastoral Council to assist with the implementation of Diocesan Synod outcomes and to be an ongoing forum of synodality within the local Church of Townsville.



Decree No. 2025/2

DECREE CONVOKING A DIOCESAN SYNOD

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.

In accordance with the prescriptions of the Code of Canon Law (cf. can. 460-468) and in response to the pastoral needs of our diocese, after prayerful discernment and consultation, I hereby **convoke the 3rd Synod of the Diocese of Townsville, to begin on the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Friday 12th June 2026.**

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. Through prayer, study, and discussion, we seek to renew our commitment to evangelisation, deepen our understanding of the faith, and address the pastoral challenges of our time.

Participants and Responsibilities

In accordance with canonical norms (canon 463), the following shall be invited to participate in the Synod:

- The Vicar General and Episcopal Vicar
- Members of the Presbyteral Council
- Representatives of consecrated life and lay apostolates
- Delegates from each parish, chosen in consultation with their pastors
- And other persons as required or discerned necessary to assist with this synodal process

Each participant is called to approach this Synod with a spirit of prayer, humility, and openness to the Holy Spirit.

Preparatory Phase

A preparatory commission shall be established to organise the Synod's themes, agenda, and working documents. Listening sessions will be conducted throughout the diocese to gather insights and reflections from the People of God. I encourage all the faithful to engage in this process through prayer, study, and discussion within their parish communities.

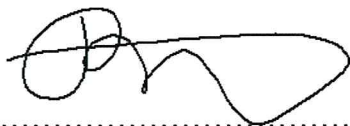
Invocation of the Holy Spirit

As we embark on this sacred journey together, I entrust this Synod to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Patron of our Diocese under the title Mary Help of Christians. May the Holy Spirit guide us in wisdom and charity so that this Synod may bear fruit for the glory of God.

Given at Sacred Heart Cathedral, Townsville, on this 27th day of June in the Year of our Lord 2025, on this Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.



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Most Rev Timothy James Harris
Bishop of Townsville



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Rev Damian John Chrysanthus McGrath
Notary