



BUILDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD TOGETHER – **OUR JOURNEY**

ENGAGING IN CONTEMPLATIVE DIALOGUE



Foreword

Jesus once remarked to a man who, if defined by his group membership, might have been expected to be an opponent, 'You are not far from the Kingdom of God'. The 'scribe' in question had just admitted the truth of what Jesus had said, that the greatest commandment of the Law was to love God and neighbour, and not any of the multiple rules, regulations or practices that were the scribe's stock-in-trade. To his credit, the scribe recognised the truth when he heard it. And suddenly he and Jesus were on the same page. Religiously, they could journey together now. 'Synodality': a shared recognition of what the journey is all about.

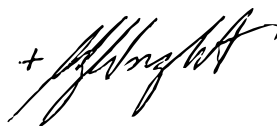
This booklet has been produced as an aid to reflection on what our journey of faith is all about, here and now and in this diocese and nation. It offers a process for *listening*, primarily to God, so that as we talk with each other on the way to our diocesan synod, we might recognise in each other's words what is true and good and of God. We want to end up not just new and shiny in some sort of updated version: we want to end up 'not far from the Kingdom of God'.

Let's recall what has happened so far. After a long consultation about 'What is God asking of us in Australia today?', which fed into both our Synod and the National Plenary Council, we held the first Session of Synod in November 2019. As the data from the consultations in this diocese were fairly consistent with others across the nation, we adopted the same six themes as the Plenary Council and commenced consideration of them through workshops and presentations at that First Session.

Now we prepare for the second Session of Synod in May this year. The Lenten reflections in this booklet are an important part of that preparation.

Having the six 'themes' of the National Pastoral Council still in our minds, we take a different perspective in these reflections. Drawing on our own diocesan traditions, the reflections are structured around the 'Five Foundations' that have shaped our thinking about church life in this diocese for many years. The context of each reflection is important. Each is framed by Scripture, prayer, quiet, dialogue, story, theological principles around the particular 'Foundation', and the concerns that we have heard in the data from the original consultations and more recently. Whether you undertake these reflections in a group or individually, it will be important to listen well before jumping to dealing with the issues. We listen to the Scripture, we listen in prayerful quiet, we listen to what others have been saying as their concerns. Of course, we will have things to say ourselves but, like Jesus' words to the scribe, our 'opinion' will come after listening and weighing what seems to us to be 'not far from the Kingdom of God'. We're listening for the voice of the Spirit, in ourselves and in others. We're not essentially looking for yet more 'good ideas'; we're listening for the voice of the Shepherd, something we recognise as God's wisdom.

It is my job as Bishop to call you to unity in Christ, to have courage and to witness. By engaging with the resources in these reflections, we give ourselves the opportunity to open ourselves up to being a community of missionary disciples, to journeying together to Build the Kingdom of God.



Most Reverend William Wright
Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle

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Welcome

We welcome you to the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle contemplative dialogue and reflective experience which you are encouraged to engage in during Lent 2021. The Gospel readings this year have been aligned to the five foundations of Identity and Community; Worship and Prayer; Formation and Education; Mission and Outreach; and Leadership and Structure.

As we continue the synodal journey, take advantage of the multiple resources as you contemplate leading towards the risen Christ at Easter and the second session of Synod. You can reflect on the Bishop's response to the Gospel, immerse yourself in visual liturgy of our Christian story and contemplate the data gathered from the first session of Synod and the Plenary Council for our diocese. Each week we encouraged you to engage in the resources before coming together to pray and connect in contemplative dialogue.

– The Synod Working Party

Synod Theme:

Building the Kingdom of God together in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

On the feast of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, 8 August 2019, Bishop Bill formally convoked our Diocesan Synod which was held in association with the National Plenary Council 2020. The opening session of the Synod on 23 November 2019 concluded with the solemn celebration of the feast of Christ the King, and the closing session will conclude with the solemn celebration of the same feast in 2021.

'Building the Kingdom of God Together in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle' was therefore chosen as the theme for the Synod.

In the context of our 21st century Australian Church seeking to be 'inclusive, participatory and synodal'¹ some may question whether the concept of 'building a kingdom' will help us as a diocesan community – to respond to the challenges we face at this time in our history.

However, if we are truly seeking to be a more Christ-centred Church and to address the challenging Plenary Council 2020 themes, then our focus needs to be on Jesus and on the Good News he came to bring.

Throughout the gospels that Good News was presented by Jesus in terms of 'the kingdom' – in well over 100 verses.

Jesus' first spoken words in the gospels were, "The time has come ... The kingdom of God is near." (Mk 1:15) and he described his own mission as being "sent to preach the gospel about the Kingdom." (Lk 4:43). He went "throughout all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom" (Mt 4:23). He taught his followers to pray, "Thy kingdom come" (Mt 6:10).

"The kingdom" was in fact the central theme of Jesus' teaching, his way of communicating to his followers the



gospel values that would counteract evil and lead them to understand God's love and to enjoy happiness in this life and the next.

Jesus wanted his followers to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Mt 6:3), and he told many parables to explain what he meant by that. The kingdom of God was, he said, like a treasure hidden in a field, like a mustard seed, like leaven hidden in dough, like a dragnet cast into the sea gathering fish of every kind. He often said the kingdom "may be compared to" ... to a man who casts seed upon the soil; to ten virgins awaiting the bridegroom; to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves; to a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers; to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said of the poor in spirit and of those persecuted for the sake of righteousness that "the kingdom of God is theirs" (Mt 5:3,10). He spoke about how difficult it was "for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mt 19:23), and



significantly, he associated the kingdom with children: “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.” (Mk 10:15).

Jesus was, of course, not promoting an earthly, patriarchal kingdom of wealth, status and power, but rather the exact opposite, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (Jn 18:36).

His was a kingdom concerned with “truth and life, holiness and grace, justice, love and peace” (LG 39)². It was concerned with God’s unconditional love seeking to transform people’s lives and their relationships with God and with one another.

For that reason, Paulist Fr. Richard Chilson csp has suggested that it may be helpful to think of the Kingdom of God as ‘Love’s Domain’ or ‘Love’s Rule’ because it exists ‘where the God who is Love rules.’

The kingdom of God describes this world as it would

be if gospel values were lived.

As we seek to listen to what the Spirit is saying to us through the words of others, including those who may differ from us, we will also listen to what the Spirit continues to say to us through the words of Jesus in the gospels and we will seek to understand them better.

That is surely the only way we will really discern how is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is missionary and evangelising; inclusive, participatory and synodal; prayerful and Eucharistic; humble, healing and merciful; a joyful, hope-filled servant community; open to conversion, renewal and reform³.

That is the only way we will challenge and support one another in ‘Building the Kingdom of God together in this Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.’

1 Plenary Council 2020 Discernment Themes

2 Vatican II *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church

3 Plenary Council 2020 Discernment Themes

Contemplative Dialogue

Each week during Lent we encourage you to immerse yourself in the range of resources. Access them online at www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom or within this package.

- ▶ Gospel readings
- ▶ Bishop's Gospel reflection
- ▶ A Visual Liturgy of Our Story
- ▶ Foundational Statements
- ▶ Concerns and Recommendations.

When you gather as a small group of 5-6 people, face-to-face or online, use the contemplative dialogue practice.

Contemplative dialogue leads to a shared understanding. We listen from an inner silence that creates a space where something new can emerge. Our intention is to move beyond the personal as we probe significant ideas together and listen deeply for truth in another's point of view. Contemplative dialogue is a means of readying the ground for collective transformation, for helping shift from I to WE, from individualism to communion. Contemplative dialogue brings into focus the possibilities for genuine openness, listening, and transforming. Through the process of dialogue, individuals can grow and better understand each other. Even when disagreement exists, the process of dialogue builds trust and greater connection.

Let us contemplate...

We Gather

Sit comfortably in a circle, or if online, focus your attention through the device you are using ... and let the silence deepen.

We Acknowledge Country and Pray

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians from the land on which we gather, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We give thanks for their care of this land over thousands of years.

Synod – Plenary Prayer

*Come, Holy Spirit of Pentecost.
Come, Holy Spirit of the great South Land.
O God, bless and unite all your people in Australia and guide us on the pilgrim way of the Plenary Council.*

*Give us the grace to see your face in one another and to recognise Jesus, our companion on the road.
Give us the courage to tell our stories and to speak boldly of your truth.*

*Give us ears to listen humbly to each other and a discerning heart to hear what you are saying.
Lead your Church into a hope-filled future,
that we may live the joy of the Gospel.*

*Come, Holy Spirit of Pentecost.
Come, Holy Spirit of the great South Land.
Come into our Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle
And show us how we can build the Kingdom of God.*

*Give us the courage to face our past,
the heart to look to the future with clear eyes
the grace to listen to each other with love and respect
as we work for justice, peace, and reconciliation.*

*Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
bread for the journey from age to age.*

Amen.

*Our Lady Help of Christians, pray for us.
Our Lady of Perpetual Help, pray for us
St Mary MacKillop, pray for us.*

We Participate in Contemplative Dialogue

Each question is taken separately.

Each person is given the opportunity to speak without comment from others.

Each one contributes her/his own insight while being attentive to the emergence of shared wisdom in the dialogue.

The dialogue stops when there seems to be a natural ending, about an hour and a half.

We share

Q1. From your reflections of Scripture, Our Story, Foundational Statements, Concerns and Recommendations – what resonates with you?

Each person shares without comment from others.

Everyone listens to each other.

Then in silence and listening for the Spirit, consider:

“What did you hear from the group sharing and what feelings has it prompted in you?”

Then each person shares their response before the group moves on to the next question.

Q2. From your reflections of Scripture, Our Story, Foundational Statements, Concerns and Recommendations – what challenges you?

Each person shares without comment from others.

Everyone listens to each other.

Then in silence and listening for the Spirit, consider:

“What did you hear from the group sharing and what feelings has it prompted in you?”

Then each person shares their response before the group moves on to the next question.

Q3. From your reflections of Scripture, Our Story, Foundational Statements, Concerns and Recommendations – what is the invitation to you personally and for your local Church community?

Each person shares without comment from others.

Everyone listens to each other.

Then in silence and listening for the Spirit, consider:

“What did you hear from the group sharing and what feelings has it prompted in you?”

We form our Response

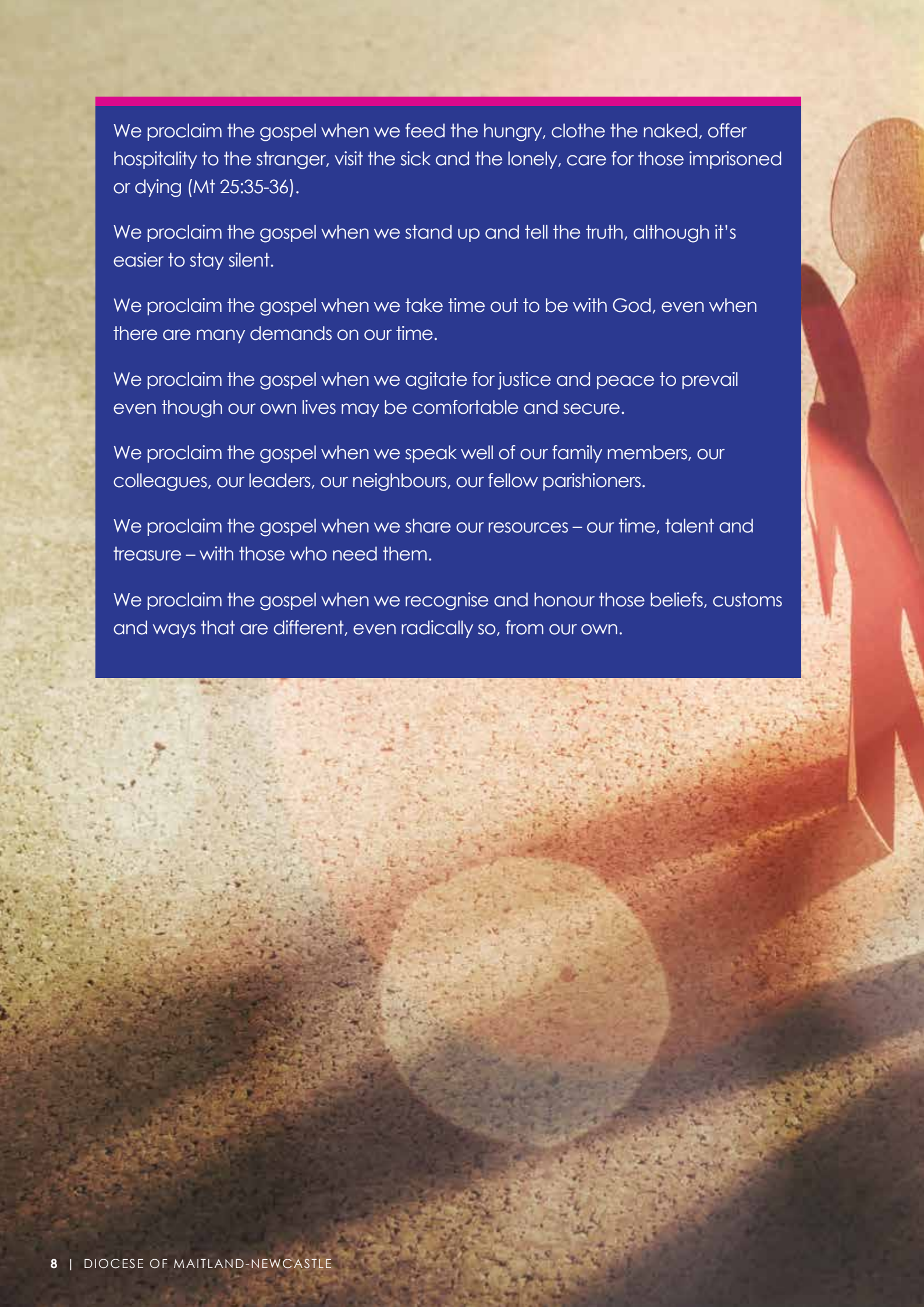
The leader invites each person to share how she/he experienced the session.

The leader invites each person to name the shared wisdom of the group.

If the group wishes, after your session you can send your responses through to the Synod website. These responses will inform and guide the ongoing discernment process for all those involved in the Synod journey.

Reflecting through Lent and Easter

- ▶ **Ash Wednesday** – Launch of Project Compassion and Synod Reflection Program
- ▶ **Week 1** – Identity and Community
- ▶ **Week 2** – Worship and Prayer
- ▶ **Week 3** – Formation and Education
- ▶ **Week 4** – Mission and Outreach
- ▶ **Week 5** – Leadership and Structure
- ▶ **Week 6** – Holy Week – The Way of the Cross – “Journey to the Synod under the patronage of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop.”
- ▶ **Easter ceremonies**
- ▶ **Post Easter** – Reflections with Bishop Bill.



We proclaim the gospel when we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, offer hospitality to the stranger, visit the sick and the lonely, care for those imprisoned or dying (Mt 25:35-36).

We proclaim the gospel when we stand up and tell the truth, although it's easier to stay silent.

We proclaim the gospel when we take time out to be with God, even when there are many demands on our time.

We proclaim the gospel when we agitate for justice and peace to prevail even though our own lives may be comfortable and secure.

We proclaim the gospel when we speak well of our family members, our colleagues, our leaders, our neighbours, our fellow parishioners.

We proclaim the gospel when we share our resources – our time, talent and treasure – with those who need them.

We proclaim the gospel when we recognise and honour those beliefs, customs and ways that are different, even radically so, from our own.

Week 1:

Identity and Community

Gospel: Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Listen to the Gospel

www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

The Church of Maitland-Newcastle is centred on Christ, the Cornerstone, and seeks always to live as a community of people who believe and are missionary disciples.

Listen to the Bishop's reflection at:
www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

In the pages that follow we explore the first "Foundation" of our life and mission as the Church of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

Our Story takes us to the Acts of the Apostles, the source of our identity as a community of Jesus's disciples.

Foundational Statements remind us of what should characterise communities committed to his mission of bringing the Good News of God's love to our world.

Concerns summarise related issues raised by diocesan respondents to the Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue Session as well as those who submitted written responses at the first session of our Diocesan Synod in November 2019.

Recommendations suggest what could be done to address the issues raised in the preceding section. In many cases they will involve personal and communal conversion and/or actions at local community level.

Our Story

Watch the Visual Liturgy at:
www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

On the day of Pentecost three thousand became disciples of Jesus, evangelised by the few on whom the Holy Spirit first descended.

They remained faithful to the apostles' teaching, to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. The whole group was united, heart and soul, gladly and generously sharing all.

They grew and developed beyond their Jewish roots, assuming a separate identity as 'the Way' and as 'Christians'. "See how these Christians love one another!"

The early Christian community gathered around those whom Jesus had gathered around himself.

They 'remembered' what Jesus said and did, passing on their treasured encounters with the God-man who had invited them to think, speak, and act like him in relating to God and to one another.

By word and example Jesus had taught them to be lovers always, motivated by the love of God.

They were to be known for loving enemies, turning the other cheek, endlessly forgiving!

Such radical, counter-intuitive behaviour identified a community as founded by Christ. Animated by Christ's continuing presence through the Holy Spirit it was destined to flourish.

Today, the Church of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle is the local gathering of the global Catholic Church in the Hunter-Manning. It is our Church where we are at home.

Here we encounter Christ as his beloved friends and disciples and seek to grow our relationship.

It is the community from which we reach out to share the good news of God's saving love to all and to serve the coming of God's reign in the world.

We are Catholic Christians, belonging to the community of word and sacrament in continuity with the first Christians, including strong women of influence like Mary, Priscilla and Lydia.

We share with the first disciples the essential elements that defined them. We are faithful to the legacy of the Apostles, handed on under the leadership of their successor, our Bishop.

We seek equality and unity as children in God's family. We seek to love God faithfully, and to love others in practical service. We seek justice, mercy and love, especially for the poor and marginalised.

We are called to be a community of "intentional disciples" who know the Lord well and warmly, who seek to follow him out of love and make him known and loved by others.

As humans we are imperfect in our attempts to be united heart and soul, to live together in harmony and to share our resources. To the extent that we succeed, we identify ourselves as Christ followers.

It is important that we as a diocese, all of us, remember the criminal conduct, the terrible things that were done here and the failures that allowed them to go on. But there are ways of remembering, ways of caring for survivors and ways of ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable people, which help keep us committed, from which we get better as a church through which we contribute to a better society.

Acknowledging our guilt for this evil reality, we strive to overcome our sins against the love in practice that should clearly identify us.

Foundational Statements

We are a people of faith, "intentional disciples" of Jesus, entrusted with a mission by God – the mission of proclaiming the Good News of God's love.

"The Church comes to be as the Church engages in mission – as it realises that its mission is the very mission of God: to go into the world and be God's saving, healing, challenging presence ... The Church is not about the Church. It is about what Jesus called the reign of God" (Stephen Bevans SVD, *The Mission has a Church*).

"Take a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one" (Pope Paul VI *Proclaiming the Gospel*, 21).

We are called to be a welcoming, listening Church for all, attending to wounds of hurt and rejection, poor with the poor.

"Love is our foundation and our destiny. It is where we come from and where we're headed" (Richard Rohr OFM).

"Let the Church always be a place of mercy and hope, where everyone is welcomed, loved, and forgiven" (Pope Francis, June 2013).

"[Christians should welcome others] without classifying them on the basis of social condition, language, race, culture, religion ... mercy is that way of acting, that style, with which we try to include others in our life, avoiding closing up into ourselves and into our selfish securities" (Pope Francis on Twitter, Nov 2016).

"There is a sense that we are still coming to terms with the depth of the hurt and trauma of the victims and survivors of sexual abuse, along with the distressing shock that ripples throughout the whole Church. There is a great demand to acknowledge this pain and trauma, own the consequences of this dark chapter in our story and respond with courage, humility, and tenderness" (Plenary Council Thematic Paper, 2019).

We are a people who respect and support the diversity of roles and functions in the community, while maintaining the equality of each individual before God.

"Diversity is valuing difference because it makes a difference: we see more when there are more of us seeing" (Margaret J Wheatley, *Who do we choose to be*. 2017).

"I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security" (Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel* 49)

"... the Church as a community of faith can never outgrow its need for conversion to greater authenticity in its faith and action" (*Light from the Southern Cross report 2020*, p25).

Concerns and Recommendations

1. COMMUNITIES AND FAMILIES

What we heard:

- ▶ Need to be focused on Jesus, the Word of God, committed to continuing his mission of bringing the Good News of God's love to our world, and to witnessing in society to his teachings.
- ▶ Need to see Jesus as their friend, as part of their community, not as another program to make him real to us.
- ▶ Need to understand and live out their baptismal call and seek to be Christ-like – joyful, loving, accepting, healing, prayerful – and to reflect the gospel values of justice, compassion, forgiveness, peace, equality, and freedom in all they do.
- ▶ Need to feel that they are all valued as people of God – no conditions on belonging – showing what it means to be unconditionally loved by God.
- ▶ Need a community that addresses the realities of people's lives from childhood to the grave in language that is easily understood, that encourages the participation of all – children, young people, parents – with all the challenges that might involve.
- ▶ Need to be acknowledged as pilgrim people – prioritising mission over maintenance, not a power hierarchy or institution structured around 'ordination'.
- ▶ Need a Church community that actively functions as a human community – as God's people, rather than seeing a building as the key ingredient of our Catholic identity.

What we recommend:

IC 1.1 That priority in our Diocese be given to building life-giving communities that reflect the words of Jesus, "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full".

IC 1.2 That a culture of family be promoted that affirms its role in society and in the Church, honours parents and carers in their role of making Jesus known to their children, supports families in dealing with the realities of people's lives from childhood to the grave, and provides formation and practical assistance to help them.

2. RELATIONSHIPS

What we heard:

- ▶ Need to build relationships with God, others, self, and creation.
- ▶ Honour, value and respect each other and the differences by seeing Christ in oneself and the other, and to encourage a sense of worth and belonging in everyone encountered.
- ▶ Strengthen our parish communities so that they become centres of joy, hope and service to their own members and the wider community.
- ▶ Grow in our understanding of what it means to be a missionary disciple sent forth at the end of Mass to continue Jesus's mission in our daily life.

What we recommend:

IC 2.1 That with Jesus Christ at the heart of everything, we prioritise and support whatever enables people to grow in their relationship with God, self, each other, and creation.

IC 2.2 That we strengthen our parishes and organisations so that they become centres of joy, hope and service to their own members and the wider community.

3. LISTENING

What we heard:

- ▶ That the voice of the Spirit is in everyone, believer or non-believer.
- ▶ That the disconnected, the disillusioned, the confused, as well as the joy-filled, are valued by all without judgment.
- ▶ The need to consider others' certainties, others' ways of saying things, and other ways of looking at what we see.
- ▶ The value of those with whom we disagree, in order to "learn and not to refute", willing to face our own prejudices, to discover what the Spirit may want us to hear.

What we recommend:

IC 3.1 That in this time of a change of an era, we all endeavour to listen and discern with the ear of the heart, open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through scripture, prayer, and story.

IC 3.2 That we seek to be open to listening and responding to those outside our framework and culture without bias or agenda, even when it is unsettling and requires us to reach out.

4. WELCOMING

What we heard:

Concern for the elderly, the poor, young people, newcomers, single parents, divorced and remarried people, Catholics who no longer attend church, singles, people with disabilities, the marginalised, the vulnerable and those at risk, refugees and asylum seekers, those of other cultures, of different faiths, survivors of sexual abuse, and those of different sexual orientation.

What we recommend:

IC 4.1 That in our parishes and organisations we review our culture, behaviour, attitudes, in order to create places of inclusivity and welcome.

5. DIVERSITY OF GIFTS

What we heard:

- ▶ The belief that all are made in the image and likeness of God.
- ▶ Need to discern, use, and rejoice in the call and gifts given by the Spirit to all people – women, men and children.
- ▶ Embrace and celebrate diversity of God's gifts within our communities.
- ▶ Recognise our own incompleteness and appreciate that no individual or group is sufficient by itself, that we are all 'on a journey'.

What we recommend:

IC 5.1 That we embrace and celebrate the diversity of God's gifts within our communities.

IC 5.2 That we endeavour to build a discernment of gift's culture by encouraging all adults and children to explore and discern their gifts and use them for the good of the whole community.

6. SMALL COMMUNITIES

What we heard:

- ▶ Need to encourage small communities for believers and searchers.
- ▶ Explore new models of community.
- ▶ Learn from other Church communities who are doing 'mission' well.
- ▶ Form small faith sharing groups in the parishes, for example, family groups, Alpha, Cells, Cursillo.

What we recommend:

IC 6.1 That parish communities be encouraged to develop a renewed vision of parish as a community of communities.

IC 6.2 That we encourage each of our Church communities and organisations to support the creation of small groups of faith and life.

IC 6.3 That we investigate and learn from the experiences of our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Listen to the Gospel —————
www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

Week 2:

Worship and Prayer

Gospel: Mark 9:2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

The family gathering is often a highlight – a summit – of family life, particularly if a milestone is being celebrated – and a source of greater unity and harmony.

When a family gathers, the host/s will have taken time to plan and prepare. Some guests will also prepare a contribution while others may have to travel a distance or care for children or elderly family members and just getting there will be their contribution! Each guest will be welcomed and there may be references to why the gathering's being held and what's happened since the last gathering ... **It's a kind of family Introductory Rite.**

There are sure to be apologies – I forgot to bring ... I'm late, I meant to tell you Josh broke his leg and won't be able to do stairs ... **It's a kind of family Penitential Rite.**

There will be storytelling, and some of the stories will be new and some will be comfortingly familiar. Family members who have died will be recalled lovingly ... **It's a kind of family Liturgy of the Word.**

When it's mealtime, the collective shopping/menu planning/cooking /table setting/ serving will all come together in a joyous, maybe raucous banquet – the kind you'd hate to miss ... **It's a kind of family Liturgy of the Eucharist.**

Before guests depart and the host begins restoring order, there will be reflections, thanksgiving and resolutions to do it all again – soon! **It's a kind of family Concluding Rite.**

The Church of Maitland-Newcastle is centred on Christ, the Cornerstone, and seeks always to live as a community of people who pray and worship.

Listen to the Bishop's reflection at:
www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

In the pages that follow we explore the second “Foundation” of our life and mission as the Church of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

Our Story reminds us that since the beginning, Jesus's followers have devoted themselves to the “breaking of bread and the prayers” – in memory of Jesus.

Foundational Statements point to the qualities that should identify communities of Jesus's disciples who pray and worship.

Concerns summarise the issues raised by diocesan respondents to the Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue Session as well as those who submitted written responses at the first session of our Diocesan Synod in November 2019.

Recommendations suggest what could be done to address the concerns raised.

Our Story

Watch the Visual Liturgy at:
www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

The community of disciples born of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost remained faithful to ‘the prayers.’

They went as a body to the Temple every day, worshipping God in continuity with their heritage.

The Psalms rang out in their hearts in synagogue and temple worship, just as they had for Jesus.

Those who had walked with Jesus in Galilee witnessed to their experience of him at prayer.

They had observed Jesus communing with his Father, often seeking solitude for this intimacy.

Jesus had taught them how to pray. He invited them in childlike simplicity to boldly and confidently approach Abba, our Father, asking God to reign in our world and provide for our needs.

These eyewitnesses told how Jesus prayed for his Father's guidance and strength when facing difficulties and at critical junctures in his ministry. This was reflected in the practice of the infant Church that prayed as a community when confronting challenges and discerning new pathways.

The eyewitnesses related how Jesus did mighty works of healing. The early Christians therefore invoked the name of Jesus confidently, calling on him to work through them to heal.

Most distinctively of all, the first Christians met in their homes for the breaking of bread. “Do this in memory of me,” Jesus had said. Feeding with earthly sustenance was accompanied by the meal of Christ's Body and Blood. Like the two disciples at Emmaus, “they recognised him in the breaking of bread.”

At the heart of their celebration was the unity and love that Jesus had prayed for at the last supper when he gave himself in the humble service of washing feet and in the Eucharist.

Today, prayer still unites us with God as individuals and as diocese, and with one another in Christ.

The heart of our union is the Eucharist, the “source and summit of the Christian life”. As Catholics in the Diocese

of Maitland-Newcastle we gather at our parish Mass to celebrate the Lord's Day.

The Lord himself is present in word and action, in the very community he gathers around him, and in the Priest who presides. We are sustained by the word of Scripture and nourished on Eucharist.

We go from Mass taking all we have celebrated to our lives, and the love of God to our encounters.

As it was in Apostolic times, we celebrate birth into our Catholic Christian community. Immersion into the life of God and the life of the community is accomplished in the Sacrament of Baptism.

Infants are welcomed and cherished. Adults are embraced. The baptised are confirmed in Christian faith and fully initiated into the community of Christ's disciples in the Eucharistic meal. Here they have access to the fullness of sacramental blessings bestowed by our gracious Lord.

As well as our sacramental and liturgical celebrations, there are within our Diocese opportunities to commune with God in the intimacy of solitude, and in the embrace of community. Eucharistic adoration, rosary, charismatic gatherings, Zoom prayer meetings and *lectio divina* are but some of the devotions enriching the lives of individuals and faith communities.

Foundational Statements

We gather in community – to pray, to break open the Word, to celebrate, to encourage and support one another, to mourn our losses, to be nourished and strengthened for mission.

"In the face of so many wounds that hurt us and could lead to a hardness of heart, we are called to dive into the sea of prayer, which is the sea of the boundless love of God, in order to experience his tenderness" (Pope Francis on Twitter).

"Miracles happen. But prayer is needed! Prayer that is courageous, struggling and persevering, not prayer that is a mere formality" (Pope Francis on Twitter).

"You pray for the hungry. Then you feed them. That's how prayer works" (Pope Francis on Twitter).

We believe that our mission finds its source and summit in the Eucharist (LG 11). When lived in everyday life and celebrated in the liturgy, the Eucharist is the living symbol of Christ's life, death and resurrection and celebrates the deepest identity of the Church as a communion of life, love, and truth.

"When you hear 'The body of Christ' you reply 'Amen.' Be a member of Christ's body, then, so that your 'Amen' may ring true" (From a homily by St Augustine).

"We seldom notice how each day is a holy place/ Where the Eucharist of the ordinary happens/ Transforming our broken fragments/ Into an eternal continuity that keeps us" (John O'Donohue, *A Book of Blessings*, 2007).

"The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open ... This is especially true of the sacrament, which is itself 'the door': Baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak." (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 47).

We know that life has a sacramental dimension and that our sacramental rituals are moments of deeper communion with the God who created us for love.

"We human beings need signs and symbols to express what cannot be expressed in words" (Thomas Groome, *What Makes Us Catholic: The Sacramental Principle*, 2012).

"Catholic Christians tend to associate sacramentality too exclusively with what happens in Church, with the celebration of the seven sacraments ... the great sacraments are simply climactic celebrations of the sacramentality of life..." (Ibid).

"... all the sacraments are symbolised by the 'ordinary' of life, by bread, wine, water, oil, touch, words, gestures, and lovemaking in marriage. Each symbolises something profoundly everyday that by the power of God's Spirit continues the saving mission of Jesus" (Ibid).

Concerns and Recommendations

1. PRAYER, CONTEMPLATION, CONVERSION

What we heard:

- ▶ As followers of Jesus, we are all called to holiness, to deepen our relationship with God, our friendship with Jesus, to be more reflective and self-aware.
- ▶ We need to trust that if we seek we shall find, ask we shall receive, knock and the door will be open.
- ▶ We become prayerful and Eucharistic by adopting an attitude of gratefulness (cf. Greek word *eucharistia*, which means 'thanksgiving').
- ▶ The need to recognise the diversity in faith expression.

What we recommend:

WP 1.1 That the Diocese develops and provides new liturgical and prayerful experiences, both formal and informal, to help people pray in their daily lives.

WP 1.2 That space and experiences for silence, meditation, contemplation, and mindfulness be promoted and encouraged with formation given in listening to and discerning the voice of the Spirit.

2. EUCHARIST

What we heard:

- ▶ A need to strengthen and affirm what is already present in the Eucharist: This is the Body of Christ. You are the Body of Christ. Be the Body of Christ.
- ▶ A need to proclaim the message of mercy, compassion and forgiveness at Eucharist and then go out and live that in the world ... through Him, with Him, in Him.
- ▶ A need to "Do this in remembrance of me." You are that living Eucharist and the living temple of God. You are the Church on mission.
- ▶ The Eucharist, when lived in everyday life and celebrated in the liturgy, as the source and summit of our life as Jesus's disciples.
- ▶ Falling Mass attendance and ageing, diminishing parish communities; the need for better attention to all aspects of liturgy: music, homilies, translation.

- ▶ Language of liturgy that presently portrays a very limited way of thinking about God, and continues to use sexist language.
- ▶ The need for Communion for all, and Eucharistic hospitality.

What we recommend:

WP 2.1 That we deepen our shared understanding of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, in ourselves and in others; of how this presence connects all elements of our Christian calling, worship and service; and of how the Mass/Eucharist nourish the hope and joy that is a foundation for our service to the world – Do this in memory of me.

WP 2.2 That we acknowledge and encourage the active involvement of different cultures be explored in liturgical ministries, including ways of connecting with and learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality and that of other cultures, and how some of the sacred rituals, dance, music and customs might be more effectively incorporated into Australian liturgical celebrations and worship.

3. HOMILIES

What we heard:

- ▶ Better homilies and pastoral care from priests – stronger and more engaging preaching with emphasis on the Word of God and its connection to people's everyday lives.
- ▶ Homilies that support an educated laity in developing mature spirituality, which enable all God's people to hear the message of the Scriptures delivered in an engaging and appealing manner.
- ▶ Help for overseas priests to deliver homilies, and to assist them to communicate and apply the Scriptures to Australian life.
- ▶ Involvement of lay people in presenting homilies – for example, to share their struggles in their faith lives in an 'experience sharing session'.
- ▶ Ways to allow interaction on the homily – either during or after Mass – in order to encourage missionary service.
- ▶ A response to Pope Francis's words: So many concerns have been expressed about this important ministry, we cannot simply ignore them (*Evangelii Gaudium* #135).

What we recommend:

WP 3.1 That lay men and women be trained and formed to exercise their gifts and talents in various ecclesial community settings, including preaching in the liturgical context.

WP 3.2 That homilists be encouraged to reflect with their parishioners on the Sunday readings in order to connect these with the daily lives and culture of the local community.

4. GATHERINGS OTHER THAN MASS

What we heard:

- ▶ At Mass people are relatively passive and never have the opportunity to share their understanding of the Scriptures or their life experiences; only the presider has the opportunity to share his faith at Mass.
- ▶ Less formal, lay-led gatherings for prayer/worship would give people the opportunity to share their faith and views, to relate community worship and prayer to people's hopes and fear, joys and suffering, and to build relationships.
- ▶ Responses to people's lives impacted by social and natural tragedies can more readily be addressed by more contemporary and less structured prayer/worship forms.

What we recommend:

WP 4.1 That meaningful and interactive opportunities be provided for people to gather for fellowship, prayer and worship.

WP 4.2 That prayer experiences in response to communal matters of significance (bushfires, floods, droughts, war, grief, pandemic) be offered so that connection is made between our faith and social action and our life experiences.

WP 4.3 That the Diocese continues to call, form and commission appropriately trained lay people to lead Liturgies of the Word and to break open the Word within the community.

5. SACRAMENTS

What we heard:

- ▶ The sacraments, for many people, seem to be unrelated to their lives in the real world.
- ▶ The reception of the sacraments seems to have little practical effect in making disciples.
- ▶ There is great decline in the use of the sacrament of Penance in its present forms.
- ▶ There is concern about the administration of the Sacrament of Initiation.
- ▶ All the baptised have the right and responsibility for the mission of the Church.
- ▶ The celebration of marriage and funerals often cause conflict.
- ▶ People often seem to turn away from frequenting the sacraments because of the necessity to abide strictly to liturgical norms.
- ▶ While there are many parts, there is but one Body, and there are a variety of gifts within the Church waiting to be tapped.
- ▶ While parishes/Diocese depend on women for many forms of ministry women are not seen in positions of authority.

What we recommend:

WP 5.1 That at small community level there be a meaningful engagement with families who present their children for the sacraments of initiation.

WP 5.2 That there be a concerted effort to help people develop their understanding of the Sacraments in an adult way, not relying on their primary school learning.

WP 5.3 That the Third Rite of Reconciliation be restored in the Church in Australia.

WP 5.4 That the Diocese commission capable and suitably trained lay people to specific ministries within the Church's sacramental life, including Baptism, preaching on the Gospel, blessing and witnessing marriages on behalf of the Church and officiating at funerals.

A woman with short brown hair, wearing a black jacket and blue jeans, is walking through a garden maze. She is seen from behind, walking along a path made of raised garden beds. The maze is set in a lush green garden with large trees in the background. The sky is overcast.

The intention of formation for mission is to enable deeper relationship with God, church, self, other, creation;

greater engagement between individuals' lives marked by "accompaniment" in the service of others;

a culture of dialogue;

stronger commitment to the ministry of teaching and parenting;

a deeper call into missionary discipleship.

A FRAMEWORK FOR FORMATION FOR MISSION, NATIONAL CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION

Listen to the Gospel

www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

Week 3:

Formation and Education

Gospel: John 4:5-42

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit,

and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps'. I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour."

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world."

The Church of Maitland-Newcastle is centred on Christ, the Cornerstone, and seeks always to live as a community of people who educate and form.

Listen to the Bishop's reflection at:
www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

In the pages that follow we explore the third "Foundation" of our life and mission as the church of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

Our Story takes us to the source of our faith in the early Church when they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching: to deepen their understanding of what Jesus taught.

Foundational Statements remind us of the responsibility we have as individuals and as communities of Jesus's disciples to deepen our relationship with Jesus and our understanding of his mission.

Concerns summarise the issues raised by diocesan respondents to the Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue Session as well as those who submitted written responses at the first session of our Diocesan Synod in November 2019.

Recommendations suggest what could be done to address the issues raised.

Our Story

Watch the Visual Liturgy at:
www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

On the day of Pentecost visitors to Jerusalem were gripped by a life-changing experience.

They heard Peter and the apostles preaching that a crucified Jesus had been raised to life.

Many were convinced by Peter's witness, accepted what he taught, and were baptised. They were immersed in a community in which they would learn to know, love, and follow Jesus Christ.

Guided by the Holy Spirit they found Christ, the Wisdom of God, foretold in their scriptures.

They came to know him in a new way which upended presumptions about power and success.

They discovered a suffering messiah to whom they would cling for his promise of fullness of life.

As Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit reminded the disciples of his words and deeds. They were able to grasp their full significance, and to pass on this wisdom to the community being formed.

The Lord's counter-cultural Beatitudes; his admonitions to turn one's cheek; to love enemies; to forgive seventy times seven; to welcome sinners; to wash feet; to embrace crosses; to die in order to live – all these now yielded their true wisdom and formed new hearts and lifestyles.

Knowing the crucified and Risen Jesus as God's wisdom, power and love enabled them to embrace him in personal relationship, and then make him known to others.

The Holy Spirit enlightened and formed the infant Church as they grew in the Lord, discerning their evolving identity and their mission to take the knowledge of Jesus to the world.

Today, through the same Holy Spirit, we too learn to know Jesus who, in all he said and did as a human being, revealed the fullness of God's faithful love. When we ask, "What must we do?" we likewise are told to see things in a different way and to immerse ourselves in Jesus.

Today, our local Church, the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, forms and teaches us as she proclaims Jesus as Son of God, the second person of the Trinity who was

made man, who died and rose again to save us from sin and for the fullness of life with God.

Our Diocese teaches the doctrines that relate to Christ and to his Church, and the practices and behaviours appropriate to Christ's followers. More importantly, it provides the formation that makes us one with Jesus as disciples eager to share the good news of God's love.

Our celebration of the Eucharist is at the core of forming us in Christ. We come to know him in the Scriptures. We are formed most profoundly as we participate in the Last Supper, Calvary, and the Resurrection. We are formed most intimately as we receive Jesus in Holy Communion.

Our Diocese provides children with holistic education in a thriving school system and a growing pre-school network. Age-appropriate formation in Christ is fundamental within this endeavour.

State School catechesis and Sacramental Programs provide a Christian education for some children. The Diocese supports parents to be the first and best teachers in the ways of the faith.

For adults, faith formation courses and learning experiences are provided at diocesan level along with learning and formation initiatives in small groups within parishes. In every instance the goal is to produce Catholic Christian disciples who are well-informed about their faith and well formed in Christ.

Foundational Statements

We believe that formation in faith is an essential and life-long process and the heritage and responsibility of every Christian.

"Formation (and not just information) ... is not for a select few, but for the faithful generally. As Church, we need to give priority to this" (Br Peter Carroll FMS, 14 July 2020).

For lay leaders assuming leadership for governance roles in the Church, especially for those whose expertise has been primarily in the commercial world, formation is needed to ensure a comprehensive understanding is acquired of the nature of the Church and the servant leadership required for service within the Church, either as an employee or as a member of a board" (*The Light from the Southern Cross*, p89).

"Children and young people grow in awareness of themselves and search for meaning and purpose in their lives and in the world around them. Children begin this journey enabled by the nurturing love of parents and families" (*Religious Education in Australian Catholic Schools*, 2017 p5).

We understand that formation for mission is respectful, experiential and relevant, building on participants' personal stories and everyday realities.

"The questions of our people, their suffering, their struggles, their dreams, their trials and their worries, all possess a ... value that we cannot ignore if we want to take the principle of the incarnation seriously. Their wondering helps us to wonder, their questions question us" (Pope Francis, September 2015).

"Unless we train ministers capable of warming people's hearts, of walking with them in the night, of dialoguing with their hopes and disappointments, of mending their brokenness, what hope can we have for our present and future journey?" (Pope Francis, July 2013).

"When [formation] brings faith into dialogue with life it has the capacity to be a source of wisdom, a stimulus to lifelong learning, a means to personal transformation and a call to missionary discipleship" (*Religious Education in Australian Catholic Schools* – National Catholic Education Commission, 2017 p5).

We are nourished and inspired by formation that is scripturally rich and ecclesially grounded, and deepens our relationship with Jesus, the living Word of God.

"It is absolutely necessary for us to take into account the heritage of faith that the Church has the duty of preserving and presenting it to the people of our time in a way that is as understandable and persuasive as possible" (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 3).

"For the Catholic school to achieve its objectives, it needs people who are committed to this faith-filled vision, confident in their understanding of the Christian faith as it comes to expression in the Catholic tradition and eager to do their best to help their students grow in their own understanding of the presence of God at work in their lives" (*A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* – National Catholic Education Commission, 2017 p3).

Concerns and Recommendations

1. BETTER FAITH FORMATION

What we heard:

- ▶ The need for adult faith formation in a wide range of topics (scripture, liturgy, Church teachings, sexuality, relationships, conscience, faith and science, living one's faith in a hyper-rational, secular age).
- ▶ A range of people needing faith formation: youth, parents, families, lay leaders, disillusioned and wounded people, those 'living the hardships and joys of marriage and family life,' those involved in pastoral ministries and diocesan agencies.
- ▶ The allocation of finance and personnel resources to the faith formation of children, while the majority of Catholics have had little or no ongoing faith formation since leaving school.
- ▶ That opportunities for adult faith formation have been limited:
 - for many, to homilies at Mass/liturgies
 - for some, to their involvement in faith-sharing groups, occasional conferences and seminars
 - for a small minority, to their participation in user-pays courses such as the Christian Formation Course, theology degree courses and Religious Education training.

What we recommend:

FE 1.1 That parish communities and diocesan agencies give priority to faith formation, aimed at encouraging and enabling all to participate in the life and mission of the Church.

FE 1.2 That a network of Formation teams be established across the Diocese in order to encourage, communicate and promote formation opportunities, including online opportunities.

2. CAREFUL, WELL-PLANNED PROGRAMS

What we heard:

- ▶ The Diocese already makes available many faith formation opportunities (cf.. work of the Pastoral Ministries Formation and Education staff (PMFE),

the Diocesan Adult Faith Formation Council (AFFC), Christian Formation Course, the Religious Education and Spirituality department of the Catholic Schools Office (RE&S), the DOMN-ACU Scholarship program, the Diocesan Liturgy Council, the Diocesan Council for Ministry with Young People (DCMYP), University of Newcastle Catholic Society, Pastoral Placement Program, CatholicCare's Marriage Team, as well as RCIA, Sacraments of Initiation Teams, and faith sharing groups such as Cursillo).

- ▶ Very few seem to make use of the opportunities provided by the Diocese, which therefore fail to touch the majority of adult Catholics.
- ▶ Current research shows that 50% of young people under the age of 30 struggle to see any connection between faith and reason; practising faith has been reduced to the attendance of Mass in the eyes of many; there is a growing distance between the Church and the modern world.
- ▶ Many diocesan employees reportedly have little understanding of the Church and its mission, while they undoubtedly have skills and expertise for the work, they do.
- ▶ There are more people than perhaps ever before in the Church with qualifications in Religious Education and Theology.

What we recommend:

FE 2.1 That research be carried out and a report prepared on the adult faith formation issues identified in Plenary Council/Synod responses, and on the groups identified as needing ongoing formation, with a view to determining future face-to-face and online opportunities the Diocese could provide, resources of finance and personnel.

FE 2.2 That the Pastoral Ministries – Formation and Education (PMFE) and the Religious Education and Spirituality department of the Catholic Schools Office (RE&S) collaborate as needed to create, adopt, or adapt programs for specific groups, which are invitational, Christ-centred, theologically sound, connected to contemporary life and accessible.

3. RESOURCES

What we heard:

- ▶ There is no physical or online centre for promoting faith formation and spiritual development.
- ▶ There is no dedicated space where people can gather for a genuine encounter with Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Catholic student numbers at state schools are increasing so more resources are needed for Special Religious Education (SRE).
- ▶ In comparison with the resources spent of the education of children, investment in adult faith formation/education has been minimal.
- ▶ Ongoing work is being done on the rationalising of all books and media resources in the Diocese.
- ▶ Existing programs such as e-learning already available, are not used.

What we recommend:

FE 3.1 That priority be given by diocesan leadership to the establishment of a Diocesan Formation Centre and a dedicated, engaging and attractive website.

FE 3.2 That effective communication methods both online and otherwise be investigated to ensure that the Diocese's efforts to address ongoing formation are well known and the availability of resources are promoted.

4. CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

What we heard:

- ▶ The decline in Mass attendance and especially the loss of young people from parish communities should be addressed via our school communities.
- ▶ The schools have a well-developed faith formation framework in place.
- ▶ Some believe it is the responsibility of our Catholic schools to produce fully formed, 'practising' Catholics.
- ▶ Lip service is given to the principle that parents are the first and most important faith educators of their children but little collaboration between schools and families is evident.
- ▶ There is a lack of understanding of the nature of faith development as a life-long process: from childhood, through adolescence, young adulthood to mature faith and the varying needs of individuals in these different stages.

- ▶ Research indicates that the greatest influence on young people attending Mass is that of parents.

What we recommend:

FE 4.1 That at the local level, parish and school communities give priority to communal conversations that will address the concerns raised by some respondents as well as communicate and promote the mission and goals of our schools.

FE 4.2 That resources be produced to facilitate such conversations and to assist staff formation, including e-learning modules for significant elements in the Religious Education curriculum.

5. CANDIDATES FOR PRIESTHOOD

What we heard:

- ▶ The process and the criteria for the selection of candidates for priesthood is unknown to most Catholics.
- ▶ Many of our diocesan priests can be considered among the injured as a result of clergy sexual abuse.
- ▶ The doctrine of ontological difference appears to separate priests from the laity.
- ▶ Concern about the low numbers of candidates for priesthood in our Diocese and in Australia.
- ▶ The majority of our priests formed in the spirit and teachings of Vatican 11 have retired.
- ▶ For overseas priests ministering in the Diocese there are cultural differences that are problematic both for the priests and the people they serve.

What we recommend:

FE 5.1 That in the interests of transparency and rebuilding trust, women as well as lay men and priests be involved in the selection of candidates for the priesthood, their seminary formation and the review of their ongoing formation as disciples as well as ministers.

FE 5.2 That the formation and training of candidates for the priesthood, and ongoing formation and training during their ministry, give emphasis to the values servant leadership, collaborative ministry, human sexuality and the dangers of clericalism.

FE 5.3 That there be appropriate supervision and performance review throughout seminary formation and beyond to parish ministry.



Listen to the Gospel

www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

Sometimes, I speak of the Church as if it were a field hospital. It's true: there are many, many wounded!

So many people need their wounds healed! This is the mission of the Church: to heal the wounds of the heart, to open doors, to free people, to say that God is good, God forgives all, God is the Father, God is affectionate, God always waits for us ... we have to help and create organisations that help in this: yes, because the Lord gives us the gifts for this. But when we forget this mission, forget poverty, forget the apostolic zeal and instead, place our hope in these human means, the Church slowly slips into becoming a non-governmental organisation, it becomes a beautiful organisation: powerful, but not evangelical, because it lacks that spirit, that poverty, that power to heal.

POPE FRANCIS HOMILY, FEB 2015

Week 4:

Mission and Outreach

Gospel: John 9:1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know

how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

The Church of Maitland-Newcastle is centred on Christ, the Cornerstone, and seeks always to live as a community of people who reach out and serve.

Listen to the Bishop's reflection at:
www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

In the pages that follow we explore the fourth "Foundation" of our life and mission as the Church of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

Our Story takes us to the source of our identity in the early Church where Jesus's disciples were described as sharing their resources and caring for all those in need.

Foundational Statements remind us of what should characterise communities who are committed to Jesus's mission of taking to the whole world the Good News of God's love.

Concerns summarise the issues raised by diocesan respondents to the Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue Session as well as those who submitted written responses at the first session of our Diocesan Synod in November 2019.

Recommendations suggest what could be done to address the issues raised in the preceding section. In many cases they will involve personal and communal conversion and/or actions at local community level.

Our Story

Watch the Visual Liturgy at:
www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit thrust the apostles out of a small room. They evangelised, proclaiming Christ's death and resurrection, bringing many to discipleship in the newborn Christian community.

They kept on testifying to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power, with the result that, 'the numbers of men and women who came to believe in the Lord increased steadily.'

One of their first acts addressed a scandal within. Certain widows were neglected and starving. The infant community reached out to them, appointing seven 'deacons' to care for their needs.

Two of the seven are reported immediately on mission, unable to be constrained to table service. They boldly and effectively declared the message near and far. Philip, "proclaimed the Good News in every town as far as Caesarea." And, "The word of God continued to spread and to gain followers."

Peter, compelled by the Holy Spirit, preached to pagans – the Roman centurion, Cornelius, and his household – and had them baptised in the name of Jesus Christ.

Paul, tireless apostle to the gentiles, dominated the mission of the early church. "Woe to me if I do not tell the good news," he would say. And, "The love of Christ compels me." His missionary outreach extended to Rome. The commission to make disciples of all the nations was symbolically fulfilled.

God's mission of love was embodied in his Son. Jesus's mission to all is embodied in his Church.

The coming of Christ's Church to the First Nations people of the Hunter and the Manning 200 years ago was not the good news Christ would have it be. Dispossession and dehumanising was the norm. Little effort was made to evangelise or reach out in a humane or Christian way.

With the passing of time outreach in charity and justice has been the prominent face of mission. It found expression in the corporal works of mercy, in educating the poor and caring for the sick and suffering. It was an evangelisation based on actions speaking louder than words.

Today our Diocese evangelises through the good works of the St Vincent de Paul Society; through CatholicCare's outreach to the needy; through care of the sick, the elderly, the dying, in hospitals, nursing homes and hospice. It evangelises through chaplaincies to seafarers and prisoners.

Perhaps most effective is the evangelisation by those who live their faith attractively in everyday encounters and dare to personally accompany seekers on their journey. Good listening, along with words and deeds of understanding, acceptance and affirmation, are Good News to those in need.

Evangelisation is a work of attraction. It draws people to Jesus the way he did – by compelling personal integrity and caring manner, by a vision of wholeness matching the longings of the heart. Joyful and grateful disciples, we can bring others to Jesus in the embrace of his community.

Foundational Statements

We regard every individual as having equal dignity and worth and because we believe that the Spirit is at work throughout the world, we respect those whose beliefs differ from our own.

"If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance ... a problem for politicians to sort out, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can respond with faith and charity, and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own ... an image of God" (Pope Francis *Rejoice and Be Glad*, 98).

"Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless his people" (St Teresa of Avila, 1515-1582).

We acknowledge and seek to be enriched by the history and wisdom of Indigenous peoples while acknowledging that reconciliation for past injustices remains a goal rather than an achievement.

"The Church in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others" (Pope John Paul II speaking to Aboriginal people in 1986 NT).

"To achieve an authentic Catholic Church in Australia, the gifts of perseverance, culture and spirituality of First Nations Catholics should be fully embraced. This goal can be achieved through education, participation in decision-making and a comprehensive commitment to fostering mutual respect between First Nations and non-Indigenous Catholics" (*The Light from the Southern Cross*, p74)

Because we believe that the Spirit is at work throughout the world, we respect those whose beliefs differ from our own, and seek to deepen our bonds with them.

"The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are willed by God in his wisdom, through which he created human beings" (From a document on human fraternity signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb).

"The strength of what unites all of us as Christians is supremely important. We can be so attentive to what divides us that at times we no longer appreciate or value what unites us" (Pope Francis, *Beloved Amazon*, 108).

We acknowledge all we have and enjoy as gifts from God and accept the responsibility to care for, nurture and share those gifts.

"Given the state of our planet, given the climate change we already experience, given the devastating loss of species, given the terrible burden of ecological disaster on the poorest people of earth, I think Pope Francis's *Laudato si'* may well be the most important church document of the twenty-first century" (Denis Edwards, *Deep Incarnation: God's Redemptive Suffering with Creatures*, 2019 p128).

Concerns and Recommendations

1. BETTER FAITH FORMATION

What we heard:

- ▶ Need to reduce margins between rich and poor
- ▶ To care for Creation
- ▶ To defend religious freedom
- ▶ To defend the right to life
- ▶ To fight for human rights
- ▶ To live in peace and harmony.

What we recommend:

MO 1.1 That evangelisation be given priority through setting a vision and broad strategy within our Diocese, appropriately resourced with funds and personnel.

MO 1.2 That any missionary or outreach activity be grounded in a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and the desire to build genuine relationships within our communities.

2. SOCIAL ISSUES

What we heard:

- ▶ Need for a unified voice at diocesan and parish level in engaging with social issues.
- ▶ Look at ways of raising awareness about significant social issues.
- ▶ Solidarity and sharing with the poor, the disadvantaged, the hurt, the needy.
- ▶ Collaboration at the local level with other social justice minded groups.
- ▶ Concern for volunteers: caring for them, acknowledging and affirming their work.
- ▶ Concern for rural Australians suffering bushfires, droughts, isolation and mental health issues.
- ▶ Concern for same-sex-attracted persons and the end of discrimination of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) people.

What we recommend:

MO 2.1 That in the spirit of the vision of 'Many Parts. One Body. One Mission.' we explore how we can create localised collaborative hubs that would provide a holistic caring response to social needs.

MO 2.2 That national and diocesan structures research and advocate on matters of social justice, working in dialogue with others across society as well as with all parts of the Church.

Re: Care of Creation

MO 2.3 That our diocesan community recognises the importance of integral ecology and ecological conversion articulated in *Laudato si'* and other Catholic Social Teaching.

MO 2.4 That across the Diocese we connect with the diverse community environmental groups and participate in activities supporting education, research, and advocacy around the environment.

MO 2.5 That the Diocese reviews our environmental footprint and impact with a view to educating, reporting, improving, leading, and modelling.

3. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

What we heard:

- ▶ Need to be united as a diocesan community in practical achievable ways to communicate solidarity and practical ongoing support for the needy.
- ▶ To reach out to all the baptised, to families, parents of children in Catholic schools, the disconnected (for whatever reason).
- ▶ ... to youth; providing more youth facilities; more youth programs.
- ▶ ... to teachers in Catholic schools to support them in their ministry.
- ▶ ... to volunteers, caring for them, acknowledging and affirming their work.
- ▶ ... to rural Australians suffering bushfires, droughts, isolation, mental health issues.

- ▶ ... to same-sex-attracted persons; end discrimination of LGBTIQ people.
- ▶ ... to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.
- ▶ ... to interfaith and other Christian groups.
- ▶ ... to the wider community and so be a more visible presence in communities especially at local level.

What we recommend:

Re: Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

MO 3.1 That our Diocese listen to and embrace the spiritual, ecological and cultural wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as important for the health of our Diocese.

MO 3.2 That the Diocese, in consultation and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Ministry and the wider community, commit to developing tangible mechanisms to embed their rich culture and spirituality in the life of the Church.

Re: Those of other Cultures

MO 3.3 That the Diocese acknowledge, welcome, support and embrace the various cultural groups that make up our local Catholic Church.

MO 3.4 That our communities create mutual, authentic opportunities for the sharing of cultures.

Re: Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

MO 3.5 That our Diocese continues to resource and support the work and outreach of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Council and that parishes are encouraged to connect with other Christian denominations and other Faith traditions in their local areas.

MO 3.6 That the Diocese collaborates and stands in solidarity with other faith traditions on social issues.

Re: Young People

MO 3.7 That we engage with young people, recognising the gifts that young people bring and together reimagine the Church's ministry to young people.

MO 3.8 That parishes be places where young people are welcomed, accompanied, encouraged to lead, supported, and embraced to feel valued and wanted.

MO 3.9 That creative young people's initiatives be investigated across dioceses and with community and faith groups in order to animate young people.

4. CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

What we heard:

- ▶ Recognise what the Catholic Church does well: social services outreach programs.
- ▶ Tell the story of the reach and impact of our Catholic services – documentary that links us all up.
- ▶ Encourage people who are good communicators to speak once a year at every Catholic parish at every Mass about works and volunteer possibilities.
- ▶ Improve the relationships of people within and between all spaces under the umbrella 'Church.'
- ▶ Collaborate between agencies (and provision of funding for starting up such projects).
- ▶ Connect parishes to Catholic services to support parishes in their growth and change.
- ▶ Christ has been taken out of CatholicCare, St Vincent de Paul, Catholic Schools. Organisations employ many non-Catholics.
- ▶ Formally identify and provide chaplains and churches for 'fringe' members of our Church – gatherings for homeless, gay, divorced, disabled.

What we recommend:

MO 4.1 That all parts of the Diocese, including service organisations and agencies, deepen their dialogue with each other to ensure that we are all working together and that we celebrate our service to the community as always rooted in the love of God, love of neighbour, generosity of spirit and striving for justice.

MO 4.2 That we tell stories of our mission and outreach through a variety of mediums to effectively promote the quality outcomes of various services in our Diocese – education, health, social services, and early childhood.

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” MATTHEW 20:25-28

Gospel: John 11:1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Week 5:

Leadership and Structure

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw

her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Listen to the Gospel

www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

The Church of Maitland-Newcastle is centred on Christ, the Cornerstone, and seeks always to live as a community of people with Leadership and Structure.

Listen to the Bishop's reflection at:
www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

In the pages that follow we explore the fifth "Foundation" of our life and mission as the church of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

Our Story takes us to the Acts of the Apostles and reminds us of the kind of leadership the early Church experienced.

Foundational Statements highlight the foundational principles upon which Christian leadership is based.

Concerns summarise the leadership and structure issues raised by diocesan respondents to the Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue Session as well as those who submitted written responses at the first session of our Diocesan Synod in November 2019.

Recommendations suggest what could be done to address the issues raised in the preceding section.

Our Story

Watch the Visual Liturgy at:
www.domnsynod.com.au/building-the-kingdom

Peter is to the fore on the day of Pentecost. The other apostles were 'with him' as he proclaimed the Good News boldly and taught with authority in Jesus's name, calling the crowd to repentance.

Peter had earlier taken the lead to ensure the integrity of 'the Twelve' in God's new structure. He initiated the prayer and the process for electing Matthias to replace Judas as witness to Jesus.

'The Twelve' saw to the commissioning of 'the Seven' to meet a need identified by members of the community, the neglect of certain widows. They called a full meeting of 'the disciples' and put their proposal, which 'the whole assembly' approved and enacted to benefit the growing organism.

Peter, the Rock, and the other apostles are affirmed in their leadership and authority in the first community. All disciples, the whole assembly of the infant Church, is actively involved in Church life and closely united with their leaders in prayer, discernment, decision making and practice.

Paul established structured communities in the localities he evangelised. Women leaders, Lydia and Priscilla, feature in this story. Legitimate teaching authority was a prime concern for the late-comer 'Apostle.' He appointed leaders to pass on what he had passed to them, the teaching he had received.

Paul himself deferred to the authority of the founding Church community. He travelled to Jerusalem to submit an account of his teaching and practice concerning admission of pagans to the Church. He was welcomed by the Jerusalem community and gave an account of what God had done through him. Some strongly opposed him. The outcome Paul sought was supported by Peter, ruled on by James, concurred with by 'the whole church' and 'decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves.'

Peter had earlier given the apostles and 'the brothers' an account of his boldness in baptising Roman pagans. His 'point by point' details of the Holy Spirit's intervention convinced the community of the rightness of his course of action. They could only defer to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Leaders at the service of mission and community featured prominently in the early Church.

Equally characteristic was prayerful communal discernment resulting in consensus decisions on major issues that determined the future direction of the Church.

The people of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle are successors and inheritors of the first Christians.

We have heard the Good News of the Father's love for us and have taken it to heart. We have united with Jesus and all who are one with him through Baptism. We live out our faith in communal and personal prayer, and through communal and personal service to one another and our society.

We have a variety of ministries and roles, and a variety of talents and charisms, all contributing to the building up of our unity in faith and love as members of Christ's Body.

As Christ's community we are hierarchical in a hierarchy of service. As Christ's community we are not dominated, but served by those appointed by Christ to ministry. We are not dictated to, but are led to discern together the way of Christ into the future.

Our Bishop has surrounded himself with consultative forums, such as the Council for Mission, which enable him and us to identify and address issues concerning the life and mission of our local church. All of us together, immersed in the life of God through baptism into our church community, are inspired and endowed to share in the mission to all humanity that Jesus received from his Father.

Foundational Statements

We seek to discover the signs of God's presence and purpose in our world. This includes being open to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church through the hearts and minds of God's people.

"Our world needs to be healed not only of the present virus, but also of the social ills of inequality, injustice and exclusion that afflict so many of our brothers and sisters in the human family" (Pope Francis, 30 Sep 2020).

"I am conscious of the effort and work being carried out in various parts of the world to come up with the necessary means to ensure the safety and protection of the integrity of children and of vulnerable adults ... Together with those efforts, every one of the baptised should feel involved in the ecclesial and social change that we so greatly need. This change calls for a personal and communal conversion that makes us see things as the Lord does" (Pope Francis, *Letter to the People of God*, Aug 2018).

"Clericalism flourishes in contexts where the lay faithful are excluded or marginalised and adopt a posture of subservience" (*Light from the Southern Cross*, p65).

We see leadership as a ministry of service, emulating the servant leadership of Christ.

"The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them ... It must not be so among you for whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be your slave even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve..." (Mt 20:25-28).

"Since the primary responsibility of all governing bodies in the Church is to nourish and serve the mission of the whole community, those who exercise authority in the Church must always be open to a deeper conversion to the grace of the Holy Spirit" (*Light from the Southern Cross*, p31).

"The shepherd has the ability to go in front of the flock to show the way, stay in the middle of the flock to see what happens within, and also be at the rear of the flock to make sure that no one is left behind" (Pope Francis, Sep 2019).

"Do I love my people in order to serve them better? Am I humble and do I listen to everybody, to diverse opinions in order to choose the best path? If you don't ask those questions, your governance will not be good" (Pope Francis, *We Need You in Washington, D.C.* 26 Sep 2013).

We welcome Pope Francis's insistent call for a synodal Church that involves the whole People of God in its life and mission.

"In the light of Christ's teaching, we have seen the importance of solidarity, subsidiarity and respect for human dignity for the shaping of a society in accord with the values of God's Kingdom, a society that gives priority to its poorest and most vulnerable members, and to the responsible stewardship of the goods of creation" (Pope Francis, 30 Sep 2020).

"... we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures" (Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel* 103).

We embrace the principle of subsidiarity: involvement and decision making belong as close as possible to those the decision affects.

"The Synod process begins by listening to the people of God ... according to a principle dear to the Church of the first millennium: What touches all should be considered and approved by all" (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium Light to the Nations*, 12).

"To emerge better from a crisis, the principle of subsidiarity must be enacted, respecting the autonomy and the capacity to take initiative that everyone has, especially the least ... this principle allows everyone to assume his or her own role for the healing and destiny of society..." (Pope Francis, General Audience 23 September 2020).

We seek to arrive at decisions that all can accept gracefully and support wholeheartedly (even if some wish the decision had been different) because they know the group honestly searched together for the Spirit of God in and for the life of the community.

"Discernment of the Spirit ... listens to others so as to learn, is sensitive to all approaches, encourages collaboration rather than competition and aims not at majority vote but consensus. It recognises that each participant has a part of the truth and a share of the wisdom by reason of each one's unique experience of God in life, union with Christ and gifts of the Spirit" (Archbishop F Carroll, Canberra-Goulburn Synod, 1989).

"How can we know if something comes from the Holy Spirit? The only way is through discernment, which calls for something more than intelligence or common sense. When we seek to develop it through prayer, reflection, reading and good counsel, then surely, we will grow in this spiritual endowment" (Pope Francis, *Rejoice and Be Glad* 166).

We accept individual and communal responsibility for our decisions and actions, our personal gifts and the gifts of creation.

"Stewardship is integral to the mission of the Church; it is a fundamental tenet of the Church's spirituality. Stewardship does not suggest 'ownership' but a responsibility for service that aims to nurture a gift from another, from the God who initiates the relationship of friendship with humanity" (*Light from the Southern Cross* p2).

"Contemporary standards of good governance require that the Church's structures and practices of governance are more accountable, more transparent, more meaningfully consultative and more participatory, including at the diocesan and parish level" (*Light from the Southern Cross* p50).

Concerns and Recommendations

1. CHANGE/TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURE

What we heard:

- ▶ Need for leaders at all levels who are:
 - willing to discern the will of the Holy Spirit and courageous enough to be open to change that allows the church to be truly the sign and instrument of God's mission in and to our world.
 - open in heart and mind to new possibilities and ways of thinking in undertaking God's work.
 - truly willing to read the signs of the times.
 - open to conversion, renewal and reform for self and for the community.
 - prepared to speak courageously like prophets; to break the walls of the museum; to go back onto our pilgrim journey.
- ▶ Need for Institutional change in governance – new model of Church, diocese, parish.

What we recommend:

LS 1.1 That the Synod direct a fundamental, comprehensive external review of leadership and governance practice, culture and training within the Diocese against the criteria of concerns stated in the *What we heard* section.

LS 1.2 That the outcomes of this review be used to inform leadership training, cultural change and spiritual reform within the diocese.

2. SERVANT LEADERSHIP

What we heard:

- ▶ Need to re-image a 'governance' that directs attention to the person of Jesus the Christ, rather than to the structures of administration and power; that is pastoral first and foremost, more than a business corporation.
- ▶ For the importance of good leadership and governance with accountability, inclusion in decision making and appointments, equality and transparency, with synodality and subsidiarity, and with ongoing and open dialogue with all Christ's faithful.

- ▶ To look afresh honestly and openly at questions of governance and leadership, and challenge structures which restrict/limit/block mercy, humility and healing.
- ▶ To be inclusive and sensitive to needs of women – gender equality in all leadership roles.
- ▶ For leadership that is crucial to communicating to parishes the notion of inclusive, participative and synodal movement.

What we recommend:

LS 2.1 That the Synod affirm a commitment to leadership and governance reform within the Diocese that is non-clericalist, synodal, inclusive, transparent and servant-leader in its style and one that affirms a deep connection between humanity and divinity, between the material and the spiritual, between the secular and the sacred, between the transcendence and the immanence of God.

3. ORDAINED LEADERSHIP

What we heard:

- ▶ Need to re-examine ordained ministry and lay ministry – acknowledge the failures of a false sense of superiority, that 'we' know it. Priests/Bishop should be evaluated.
- ▶ To explore the nexus between ordination (open to a tiny percentage of the people of God) and leadership based on the gospel; needs to be abandoned – It's not working!
- ▶ To address clericalism/ institutionalism and its impact on decision making; replace clericalism with the involvement of all the baptised.
- ▶ For priests to be more spiritual, more open to their parish community, going out to the locals as a group to speak and invite people to join us.

What we recommend:

LS 3.1 That the Synod direct the establishment of leadership training for existing clergy and for future diocesan leaders (lay and clerical) that focuses on the development of a leadership style and culture consistent with Recommendation 2.1 and Informed by the review Recommendation 1.2.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

What we heard:

- ▶ Need to explore the possibility of a new leadership and governance model.
- ▶ For transparency, accountability, responsibility, compliance in all church agencies.
- ▶ For decision-making by discernment (DPP Principle 3.8).
- ▶ To address systemic issues in order to form better relationships – especially where the system creates division, for example, schools and parishes.
- ▶ To adopt principles and practices of models of successful businesses, but the Church is called primarily to mission, to proclaim Christ the Good News of God's love for all.
- ▶ To examine the 'business' presence of the Diocese in CatholicCare, pre-schools and schools. We seem to be government-funded generic 'helpers.' Is this our mission?
- ▶ To address the need for the just remuneration of lay ministers as recommended in past assemblies.
- ▶ For greater involvement of women as essential at every level of governance and leadership so as to address gender inequity and to recognise women as being leaders in the Church.
- ▶ For shared leadership – how best to involve committed lay women and men in contributing their gifts to Church governance.
- ▶ To examine and develop all forms of diocesan communication. Don't assume the website is enough when even computer literate people rarely access it.

What we recommend:

LS 4.1 That, based on the outcomes of the leadership and governance review referred to in Recommendation 1.1, appropriate reform and re-education programs be developed to achieve the leadership and governance commitment affirmed in Recommendation 2.1 and in the *What we heard* section on this issue.

LS 4.2 That the achievement of the desired leadership and governance culture be externally audited and reported on a bi-annual basis until there is clear evidence that the new culture has been broadly established, has taken root and is self-propagating.

LS 4.3 That the terms of reference for such audits be determined by the Diocesan Council for Mission.

LS 4.4 That all diocesan management structures be reviewed and reformed with the intention to create the greatest level of subsidiarity, flattening of management structures and de-corporatisation of their management practices, including the establishment of discernment and consensus-based decision-making practices to the greatest practical extent.

5. DIOCESE/PARISH RELATIONSHIPS

What we heard:

- ▶ Improve relationships and communications between the Diocese, parishes and congregations – be more open and transparent.
- ▶ Address lack of connection between Diocese and parish, for example, no connection between Council for Mission and parish/parish councils.
- ▶ Consultation rather than the imposition of ideas/decisions.

What we recommend:

LS 5.1 That the Synod affirm the use of the leadership and governance review proposed at Recommendation 1.1, to fully understand and develop the relationship between the Diocese and the Parishes.

LS 5.2 The Synod affirms that the application of Recommendations 1.2, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 4.2 and 4.4 at parish and diocesan level will be critical to address these issues.

6. LOCAL PARISH LEADERSHIP

What we heard:

- ▶ Need for careful selection of priests and others for parish leadership.
- ▶ For parishes to be converted from maintenance to mission.
- ▶ To identify 'high performing' parishes and priests – share best practice.
- ▶ To measure 'engagement' levels of parishioners.
- ▶ For Pastoral Planning: set goals and objectives for each parish/priest, publish and share these and then measure performance.

- ▶ To support overseas priests – problem of cultural differences, understanding accents.
- ▶ For more local decision making. Subsidiarity – local actioning in practice. Don't restrict people from using their gifts.
- ▶ To restructure the clergy's part in parish decision making. Parish priests should not be able to override the will of the people.
- ▶ For the clergy to trust lay people, recognise the education of lay people today and their call to do more than administrative tasks.
- ▶ For healthy joyful service within a parish community. People need the assurance that there is a structure that will encourage and support them, and have an exit plan!
- ▶ To explore the possibility that a parish be lay-led or under a lay administrator.
- ▶ For a review of our Church buildings to ensure that they are accessible to all.

What we recommend:

LS 6.1 That communication be inclusive, participatory and synodal and based upon the 'principles of good governance.'

LS 6.2 That local decision making be encouraged based on the principles of subsidiarity and discernment and consensus-based decision making.

7. SEXUAL ABUSE AND THE ROYAL COMMISSION

What we heard:

- ▶ As a diocesan community we need to develop humility and own our brokenness and incompleteness by addressing our history of sexual abuse. We need to acknowledge what the Church has failed to achieve in order to move forward.
- ▶ To acknowledge what our Diocese has done to address sexual abuse and support victims – safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults.
- ▶ To regain trust and to help people heal after the sexual abuse crisis. More transparency and accountability needed. To acknowledge the loss of credibility and trust within the community.

- ▶ For greater concern for victims and survivors – need for institutional Church change – expressing genuine as opposed to legalistic apology for all the abuse and lack of compassion.
- ▶ To repent for clergy sexual abuse; healing liturgies and public signs or acts of reparation; ongoing and frequent liturgies of apology, forgiveness and mercy; open acknowledgment by priests at Mass, of sexual abuse.
- ▶ For better implementation of royal commission recommendations.
- ▶ For healing and moving beyond the clergy sexual abuse scandal; need to let go of what has been in the light of the institutional Church's betrayal of the People of God (of Royal Commission) and find new models based firmly on the gospel.
- ▶ For more study on causes and implications of child sexual abuse.
- ▶ Not to treat all people or priests as paedophiles.
- ▶ To care for paedophile priests.

What we recommend:

LS 7.1 A reform of the Diocese that focuses on:

7.1.1 structures that are based upon a foundation of service to the people of God humbly acknowledging the great damage done by sexual abuse and cover-up and seeking to regain the trust that has been lost.

7.1.2 structures that achieve genuine cultural reform and do not just replace clerical leadership structures of the past with new hierarchical 'business' structures. These new structures to be based upon the same values outlined in Recommendation 2.1 and informed by the outcomes of Recommendation 1.2.

7.1.3 a healthy and more meaningful view of sexuality, intimacy, friendship, relationships, the body, and conscience.

8. BRINGING THE CHURCH INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

What we heard:

- ▶ We need more positive Church public relations.
- ▶ To modernise Church teachings – allowing contraception and in vitro fertilisation (IVF); supporting same-sex marriage; supporting abortion and euthanasia; ordination of women.
- ▶ For radical change, a new order, inverted pyramid.
- ▶ To check for understanding – ‘Catholic jargon.’ Change Church rules to reflect acceptance of all can be a barrier to knowing/belonging for youth, English as second language, and converts.
- ▶ Not to change without good reason – the saving of souls was never mentioned.

What we recommend:

LS 8.1 Engage in open dialogue regarding the positive points and challenges of our modern secular age.

LS 8.2 Deal with difficult and contemporary issues from a Christ-centred empathic perspective and be open to acceptance of plurality of views and find new ways to educate and explain its teaching on contemporary moral issues.

9. PLENARY COUNCIL PROCESS

What we heard:

- ▶ Scepticism about the Plenary Council process.
- ▶ Exclusion of lay people and women from the decision-making roles of the Plenary Council.
- ▶ That the Plenary Council was not necessary vs more frequent Plenary Councils in Australia!
- ▶ The need to listen to the spirit of the law, and be freed from the letter of the law.
- ▶ That a national platform would allow people to connect with others of interest – projects, missionary services.
- ▶ The need for a national program of servant leadership for our emerging lay leaders.

What we recommend:

LS 9.1 The Diocese uses the Synod process to demonstrate the sincerity of intention for the radical cultural and spiritual change in the Church through an exemplary new leadership culture, consultation and inclusive processes, that will also address what is seen as dualistic thinking and the implications of the distinction between kataphatic and apophatic faith¹.

¹ “Kataphatic” prayer has content; it uses words, images, symbols, ideas. “Apophatic” prayer has no content. It means emptying the mind of words and ideas and simply resting in the presence of God. Centering prayer is apophatic. Ignatian prayer is mostly kataphatic. (IgnatianSpirituality.com)

Bishop's Reflection Day information

TUESDAY APRIL 13

Sessions

Reflection 2:30pm–4pm
Mass 5pm–5:30pm
Reflection 6pm–8pm

Pastoral Region

Upper Hunter

Venue

St Joseph's High School –
Segenhoe St, Aberdeen

WEDNESDAY APRIL 14

Sessions

Reflection 2:30pm–4pm
Mass 5pm–5:30pm
Reflection 6pm–8pm

Pastoral Region

Chisholm/Vineyards

Venue

All Saints College,
St Mary's Campus –
16 Grant St, Maitland

THURSDAY APRIL 15

Sessions

Reflection 2:30pm–4pm
Mass 5pm–5:30pm
Reflection 6pm–8pm

Pastoral Region

Blackbutt/Port Stephens/
Eastlakes/City

Venue

St Mary's Immaculate
Parish – 11 Milson St,
Charlestown

TUESDAY APRIL 20

Sessions

Reflection 2:30pm–4pm
Mass 5pm–5:30pm
Reflection 6pm–8pm

Pastoral Region

Northern

Venue

Holy Name Parish –
33 Lake St, Forster

THURSDAY APRIL 22

Sessions

Reflection 2:30–4pm
Mass 5pm–5:30
Reflection 6pm–8pm

Pastoral Region

Macquarie/Western

Venue

St Joseph's Parish –
140 Wangi Rd, Toronto

TUESDAY MAY 4

Sessions

Reflection 2:30–4pm
Mass 5pm–5:30
Reflection 6pm–8pm

Pastoral Region

Blackbutt/Port Stephens/
Eastlakes/City

Venue

Cathedral House,
Sacred Heart Cathedral –
841 Hunter St,
Newcastle West

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

SYNODAL DIRECTORY

DIOCESAN SYNOD 2019 - 2021

DIOCESE OF MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE

PROLOGUE

The principal elements, according to the Second Vatican Council which express the true and genuine image of the Church are:

1. The Church is presented as the People of God and its hierarchical authority as service
2. The Church as a communion and the mutual relationship between the particular and the universal Church, and between collegiality and primacy
3. All members of the People of God share, in a manner proper to each of them, in the threefold priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ

(Apostolic Constitution Sacrae Disciplinae Leges)

Canons 460 to 468 of the Code of Canon Law and the Instruction on Diocesan Synods issued in 1997 by the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for the Evangelisation of People (The Instruction hereafter) develop the manner in which a Diocesan Synod is to be put into effect for the benefit of 'those whose duty it is to execute the law, and they bind them in executing the law.' (Can. 34 '1)

This Synodal Directory for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle sets out the requirements under the headings:

- I. Nature and Purpose of the Synod
- II. Convocation and Preparation for the Synod
- III. Synod Membership
- IV. Officers of the Synod
- V. Commissions
- VI. Conducting the Synod
- VII. Synodal Declarations and Decrees

I. NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE SYNOD

Synods seek to inspire missionary renewal and unity within the diocesan community. In this way they contribute to the shaping of the pastoral activities of the particular Church and lend continuity to its own liturgical, spiritual, and canonical traditions.

The *Instruction* sets out the Nature and Purpose of the diocesan Synod which may be summarised as follows:

- Canon 460 of the Code of Canon Law describes the diocesan Synod as an 'assembly of selected priests and other members of Christ's faithful of a particular Church which, for the good of the whole diocesan community, assists the diocesan Bishop'.
- The Synod offers the Bishop the opportunity of calling to cooperate with him, priests, religious and laity such as will demonstrate the responsibility of all in building up the Body of Christ.
- Synods are instruments of governance and communion, in which the Bishop is the visible source and foundation of unity. In the process of the Synod, the Bishop exercises the office of governing the Church entrusted to his care.
- The Bishop determines its convocation and, following consultation, proposes the questions to be discussed in the Synod and presides at the synodal sessions. Moreover, it is the Bishop who, as sole legislator, signs the synodal declarations and decrees and orders their publication.

Diocesan Synods are important instruments of collaboration and discernment effecting conciliar renewal.

The work of the Synod is to:

- assist the Bishop in his office of teaching, sanctifying, and governing the Christian community;
- consult and collaborate with the diocesan community in order to build up the Body of Christ;
- discern the will of the Spirit with the diocesan community, the pastoral activities and direction, for the good of the diocese;
- foster a sense of communion and missionary renewal.
- The Synod builds up and fosters unity within the diocese and with the Holy See and the Universal Church. Hence it is necessary that the synodal documents accurately reflect the universal Magisterium of the Church and apply common canonical discipline to the particular circumstances of the diocese.
- Always bearing in mind the need for renewal and, where necessary, remedying gaps in diocesan norms, the Synod will also evaluate the adequacy of pastoral programs already in place, and with the help of divine grace, propose new pastoral plans where such are deemed desirable.¹

¹ The *Instruction on Diocesan Synods* by the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (1997) provides instruction to all bishops of the Latin Rite regarding Diocesan Synods. This Diocesan Synod Directory follows the processes outlined in the 'Instruction'.

II. CONVOCAION AND PREPARATION OF THE SYNOD

'It is the sole prerogative of the diocesan Bishop, in his prudent judgement and having consulted with the Council of Priests, to convoke a diocesan Synod.' (Can. 461). On the 8th August 2019 Bishop Wright decreed

*"Having consulted with the Presbyteral Council (CIC c. 461 § 1), and consulted the Diocesan Council for Mission (CIC c. 511), and in anticipation of the Plenary Council of Australia 2020, and in responding to the question of the plenary council - listen to what the spirit is saying, and the need to renew the Diocesan Synod of 1992-1993, I hereby convoke the Synod of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle (CIC cc. 460ff). The Diocesan Synod will be conducted according to the diocesan synodal directory."*²

The actual meaning of the word "Synod" is "journeying together". It is a long established practice in the Church to use this term for decisive meetings at significant times where members of the Church come together to review one or more issues and make decisions. It is a process by which the people of God walk together, a journey, trying to respond more fully to God. More than fifty years after the Second Vatican Council and in view both of the multiple challenges facing us as well as the opportunities that contemporary cultural changes afford us, we are at a significant moment in the history of our Diocese. There is clear duty on us to discern carefully together what the Spirit is saying to the Church in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle and agree on common goals and actions for the coming years.

Pope Francis desires that we advance along the path of what he calls 'a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are'³. We owe this to future generations and to the wider society that we want to serve. Pope Francis explains what he means by pastoral and missionary conversion when he writes, "Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says, 'We have always done it this way'."⁴ It means being bold and creative in the task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelisation in our Diocesan community with its various parish and ecclesial, religious and social communities.

Our Diocesan Synod is being held in the context of the Australian Plenary Council at which the Catholic Church in Australia. Originally, the Plenary Council was to gather in October 2020 but due to the impact of COVID-19 it has been moved to October 2021. The entire People of God in Australia began preparing for this historic moment by listening to God and by listening to one another's stories of faith in response to the question – "What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?"

"So as the Ceremonial of Bishops remarked, what we do is not simply about administration, it is about being the sacrament that the church is called to be. The sacrament that the individual baptised Christian is. The sacrament, the

² Decree of the Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle 19/2019 – 8 August 2019

³ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 25, 2015

⁴ *Ibid* 33

sign of God's power at work that any parish, any community is called to be; that we as a Diocese are called to be."

"As we move towards our Synod let the peace of Christ reign in our hearts, as we try to let the message of Christ in all its richness find its place in us. Then we might share with each other what all of that is about, and how we can better be that message of Christ incarnated in a people, in this place and time."

"I would ask you all to keep constantly in your prayers the Synod, invoking the presence of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us all. And asking Mary MacKillop (the unofficial patron), first saint of our country, for her prayers for us, as we journey together to try and serve the Lord, and shine the light in our place, as she did in her place and time."⁵

The Diocesan Synod 2019-2021, to be held in three sessions, invites the People of God to carefully discern together what the Spirit is saying to the Church of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle and to agree on common goals and actions for the coming years.

Session One – Celebration – 23 November 2019

Session Two – Discernment – 22 May 2021

Session Three – Implementation – 20 November 2021

III. SYNOD MEMBERSHIP

The diocesan Bishop presides over the Diocesan Synod. The Code of Canon Law (Can. 463) sets out those persons who are members of the Synod. They are for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle:

- the Vicar General
- the members of the Council of Priests
- the members of the Council for Mission (Diocesan Pastoral Council)
- the Deans

The law provides also that other members are to be elected in such a way that the membership, like the membership of the diocesan pastoral council, 'truly reflects the entire portion of the people of God which constitutes the diocese, taking account of the different regions of the diocese, of social conditions and professions, and of the part played in the apostolate by the members, whether individually or in association with others.' (Can. 512.2)

Details of how these members will be selected and appointed are found in

Appendix A

- The diocesan Bishop may also invite others to be members of the diocesan Synod, whether clerics or members of institutes of consecrated life or lay members of the faithful.
- The diocesan Bishop shall invite to the diocesan Synod as observers some ministers or members of Churches or ecclesial communities which are not in

⁵ Bishop William Wright, Homily at the morning Mass of 8 August 2019, on the Solemnity of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop convoking the Diocesan Synod for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

full communion with the Catholic Church, but who can play an important role in the renewal of the Catholic Church.

- Lay members must be possessed of 'firm faith, high moral standards and prudence' and enjoy canonically regular status.⁶ The diocesan Bishop shall communicate in writing to members, their designation as members and likewise, members, not bound ex officio and de jure, shall communicate their acceptance in writing.
- Synodal members once lawfully designated, have a right and duty to participate in the sessions of Synod. If they are unable to attend, a proxy cannot be sent in his or her place.

One may lose one's membership by reason of loss of title - that which qualified one to become a member - or by removal by the Bishop for a lawful reason.

As provided in Can. 833, before commencing the Synodal discussions, the members of the Synod shall make the profession of faith.

IV. OFFICERS OF THE SYNOD

President:

Bishop Wright will preside over the diocesan Synod. He may however, delegate the Vicar General to fulfil this office at individual sessions of the Synod. (Can. 462.2)

Moderator:

The diocesan Bishop appoints a Moderator to oversee the preparatory stages of the Synod and to coordinate the offices and commissions of the Synod and to moderate the sessions of the Synod. (Instr. III. B. 2.3)

Bishop Wright in consultation with the Council for Mission has appointed Diocesan Director of Pastoral Ministries (Mrs Teresa Brierley) as Moderator

Secretary:

The diocesan Bishop shall appoint a Secretary to oversee the Secretariat and Communications Commission of the Synod. (Instr. 3. B. 1). The secretary shall oversee the Secretariat and Communications Commission, set out below.

The Pastoral Ministries Office as synodal secretariat will assist in the work of the Diocesan Synod Working Party.

V. COMMISSIONS

Preparatory:

Bishop Wright in consultation with the Council for Mission has constituted the Synod Working Party as the Preparatory Commission

'The members of this preparatory commission are chosen by the Bishop from amongst the clergy and other faithful who are distinguished by their pastoral prudence and by their professional competence and who, in so far as possible, reflect the various charisms and ministries of the People of God.'

⁶ Can. 512.3; Instr. on Diocesan Synods II, 3.1

Some members should be expert in the disciplines of Canon Law and Sacred Liturgy.' (Instr. III, B, 1)

Its tasks are principally:

- to assist the Bishop in matters pertaining to the organisation and preparation of the Synod;
- in drawing up and publishing the synodal Directory;
- in the designation of the synodal members and in his determining the questions to be proposed for synodal deliberation.

The members of the Synod Working Party are:

- Teresa Brierley
- Helen Belcher
- Gary Christensen
- Sr Patricia Egan
- Uta France
- Bernadette Gibson
- Lawrie Hallinan
- Fr Geoff Mulhearn
- Helene O'Neill
- Michael O'Connor
- Ben van der Wijngaart

Supported by:

- Alyson Segrott (Pastoral Ministries)
- Jenny Harris (Pastoral Ministries)
- Brooke Cross (Communications)
- Ashleigh Banks (Communications)

The diocesan Bishop presides over the meetings of the preparatory commission. If he is unable to preside, his delegate does so.⁷

Consultative:

To assist the diocesan Bishop, whose prerogative it is to propose topics for the consideration of the Synod members, the faithful shall be afforded the opportunity of expressing their needs, desires and opinions with regard to the topics to be dealt with in the Synod. Moreover, the clergy of the diocese shall be asked separately to formulate proposals by way of response to the pastoral challenges with which they are confronted. This latter shall be done at meetings of the clergy in Deaneries, convened for that purpose, and at diocesan gatherings of the clergy. (Instr. I, 1 & III, C, 2)

The Diocesan Synod 2019-2021 journey commenced in November 2018 and continues years of synodal journeying since the 1992-93 Diocesan Synod.

The people of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle have met in regular Diocesan Assemblies and gatherings:

- 1995 (*Sacraments of Initiation*),
- 1996 (*Permanent Diaconate and Preparing Parishes for Change*),

⁷ The Director of Pastoral Ministries has been delegated to oversee the Diocesan Synod processes

- 1998/99 (*Interparish Strategic Planning*),
- 2000 (*New Wine into Fresh Wineskins*),
- 2004/5 (*Towards the Dawn*),
- 2007 (*It's Time to Celebrate*),
- 2010 – Diocesan gathering (*Moving Forward Together*),
- 2015, 2016, 2017 Regional Gatherings with the Diocesan Pastoral Council

The purpose of these assemblies and gatherings has been to '*hear God's people and empower them to participate fully in Christ's mission*' in line with the Pastoral Plan established at the 1992/93 Diocesan Synod.

Diocesan Synod 2019-2021 with the theme, *Building the Kingdom of God together in the Church of Maitland-Newcastle*, is being held in the context of the Australian Plenary Council 2020 at which the Catholic Church in Australia will gather.

The diocesan community has been preparing for the Plenary Council 2020 and the diocesan synod by listening to God and listening to one another's stories of faith in response to the question – "*What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?*"

In accordance with six Plenary Council thematic papers resulting from this listening process, the question posed by Bishop Wright to the first session of synod in November 2019 was:

As disciples of Christ, what needs to happen in our hearts and in our minds and in our community for us to be a Christ-centred Church that is:

- *Missionary and evangelising*
- *Inclusive, participatory and synodal*
- *Humble, healing, and merciful*
- *Prayerful and Eucharistic*
- *A joyful, hope-filled and servant community*
- *Open to conversion, renewal, and reform*

Session One of the Diocesan Synod was an open invitation for anyone from the diocesan community to participate and involved workshops on these six themes.

During the months since the first session of the Synod, limited by COVID-19 restrictions, the Synod Working Party has coordinated:

- the analysis of responses from the first session of the Synod as well as those contained in the diocesan report on the Listening Stage of the Plenary Council.
- the preparation of papers for further consultation based on the five foundational aspects of diocesan life
 - Identity and Community;
 - Worship and Prayer;
 - Formation and Education;
 - Mission and Outreach;
 - Leadership and Structure
- a program of consultative meetings to be held prior to the second session of the Synod.

- The following organising cycle or planning model is helpful for our synodal process:



The Instruction notes that consultation endeavours to reach all ‘vital forces’ of the People of God present and operating in the Diocese. For this reason consultation has taken place and will take place in parochial communities, institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, ecclesial associations, educational institutions and other diocesan agencies and in significant Catholic movements and groups including health and aged care communities; St Vincent de Paul, other diverse and migrant communities; youth ministry groups and ecclesial groupings such as, Charismatic Renewal, Cursillo and others; the prison community; ethnic groups and other language speaking communities.

Spiritual, catechetical, and formational preparation:

The functions of the *Adult Faith Formation Council* and the *Formation and Education Office* of the Diocese are to provide for the formation of Members of the Synod and the faithful for the more effective and fruitful celebration of the Synod. ‘The celebration of the Synod affords the Bishop a privileged opportunity for the formation of the faithful. It leads to a well-articulated catechesis of the faithful with regard to the mystery of the Church and the participation of all the faithful in her mission. Such catechesis is carried on in the light of the teaching of the Church’s Magisterium and particularly that of the Second Vatican Council. To this end, concrete directives can be given to priests for preaching.’ (Instr. III, C, 1)

A program of dialogue, contemplation and formation will be created for Lent, 2021 consisting of material developed by the Synod Working Party and its associated Focus Groups. Reflection Days and Evenings with Bishop Bill will follow during the Easter Season before the second session of synod. It is envisaged that these opportunities will provide the synod delegates with time, to listen to the voice of the people of the diocese, to listen to the Spirit and to bring to the synod what they are discerning.

The Instruction for Diocesan Synod states that 'In providing suitable directives for consultation, unjustified expectations with regard to the acceptance of proposals should be avoided.' (Instr. III, C. 2.) For this reason the Instruction provides that: 'In view of the bonds uniting the particular Church and her Pastor with the universal Church and the Roman Pontiff, the Bishop has the duty to exclude from the synodal discussions theses or positions - as well as proposals submitted to the Synod with the mere intention of transmitting to the Holy See 'polls' in their regard - discordant with the perennial doctrine of the Church or the Magisterium or concerning material reserved to Supreme ecclesiastical authority or to other ecclesiastical authorities.' (Instr. IV, 4; CD 8; Can. 381)

Determining the questions

At the conclusion of the consultative process, with the assistance of persons, expert in the various disciplines and pastoral spheres, and with the assistance of the preparatory commission, the Bishop shall proceed to determine those questions on which the synodal debate will concentrate.

Finally, the approved texts of these questions should be transmitted to the members of the Synod and sufficient time allotted for them to be studied before the initiation of the synodal sessions. (Instr. III, C, 3)

Secretariat and Communications

The synodal secretariat (Diocesan Pastoral Ministries Unit) shall be directed by a member of the Preparatory Commission (The Diocesan Synod Working Party), the Moderator (Director Pastoral Ministries). 'The function of such a secretariat is to assist the Synod as far as organisational matters are concerned: transmission and archiving of documentation, drawing up minutes, direction of logistical matters, as well as matters relating to finances and accounting.' (Instr. III, B, 1) Information concerning the Synod is disseminated to the media by means of press-releases, website material, supplements, and social media.

'All should be informed with regard to the nature and purpose of the Synod and the scope of its deliberations'. (Instr. III, C, 1) In August 2020 a document, *2020 Plenary Council – Let's Listen and Discern* was produced and widely circulated in order to invite listening and discernment conversations from across the whole diocese. The question asked was:

As disciples of Christ, what needs to happen in our hearts and in our minds and in our community for us to be a Christ-centred Church that is:

- *Missionary and evangelising*
- *Inclusive, participatory and synodal*
- *Humble, healing, and merciful*
- *Prayerful and Eucharistic*
- *A joyful, hope-filled and servant community*
- *Open to conversion, renewal, and reform*

Legal

The *Diocesan Chancellor* shall have the function of ensuring conformity, in all things pertaining to the Synod, with the General Law of the Church, avoiding matters

which are *ultra vires*, and shall, with others, expert in ecclesiastical disciplines, assist the Bishop in drafting the Decrees and Declarations of the Synod.

If there is to be a research component to the Synod or a Survey to be conducted, then ethical guidelines will be established and followed so that those participating will be able to make an informed decision concerning participation. Confidentiality will be honoured with recorded information kept secure and in a confidential place.

Liturgical and Spiritual Journey

The *Liturgy Council* through its *Synod Liturgy Focus Group* and diocesan *Liturgy Office* shall oversee the preparation of the Liturgies associated with the Synod and promote prayer for the success of the Synod.

Liturgies associated with the Synod include:

- Mass convoking the Synod celebrated on the Feast of Mary MacKillop, Thursday 8 August 2019
- The Opening Liturgy celebrated at the beginning of the first session of the Synod on Saturday 23 November 2019.
- The closing Mass for the first session of the Synod celebrated as the Vigil of the Feast of Pentecost 2019
- The Opening Prayer for each of the subsequent sessions of the Synod which will echo the Opening Liturgy.
- The Closing Liturgy for each of the subsequent sessions of the Synod which will take the form of Evening Prayer I.
- Mass celebrating the conclusion of the Synod as determined appropriate at the time.

Prayers promoting the success of the Synod include:

- a brief Synod Prayer added as an addendum to the Plenary Council Prayer following the Amen and before the concluding litany
- a selection of petitions for inclusion in the Universal Prayer at Sunday Mass, and other occasions as appropriate leading up to the Synod
- a resource encouraging weekly prayer with the Sunday Gospel for the period determined by the Synod Working Party.

VI. CONDUCTING THE SYNOD

On Thursday 8 August 2019, on the feast day of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, the Synod was officially convoked and launched at a Mass at the Sacred Heart Cathedral. The Mass, which was celebrated by Bishop Bill Wright, was attended by representatives from across the diocese and the Decree of Convocation was formally read.

Details of Procedures to be followed during the Synod sessions are to be found in **Appendix B**

VII. SYNODAL DECLARATIONS AND DECREES

At the Synod in November 2021 there will be voting on a variety of Proposals for Action. These Proposals, if adopted, then become recommendations to the Bishop for his

consideration as possible actions appropriate to the needs to the Diocese. The Bishop then has responsibility to draw up decrees and statutes based on these recommendations. He does this, cognisant of the needs, wishes and desires of the People of God but also cognisant of the general law of the Church.

Each of the six themes, from the Plenary Council process, were introduced at the first session of the Synod, drawing on the experience of the people of the diocese (as identified through the listening process) and the Tradition of the Church (as addressed through the Catechetical program).

Proposals for Action emerging from the Five Foundations Planning Framework for the Diocese, (which are recommendations to the Bishop as sole legislator) will be brought forward and these will be voted on with the vote of either Yes, No or Yes with amendments.

The Five Foundations of the Diocese are:

- Identity and Community
- Worship and Prayer
- Formation and Education
- Mission and Outreach
- Leadership and Structure

The Diocesan Bishop alone signs the synodal declarations and decrees, by which means he promotes and fosters the pastoral norms for diocesan life.

APPENDIX A

DIOCESAN SYNOD MEMBERS

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Synod is to:

- assist the Bishop in his office of teaching, sanctifying, and governing the diocesan community
- consult and collaborate with the diocesan community in order to discern the will of the Holy Spirit regarding pastoral activities and direction for the good of the whole diocese.
- foster a sense of community and renewal within the diocese.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SYNOD MEMBERS

As the Synod is a gathering of the Church, all members are to be baptised Catholics or be people who have begun the RCIA process towards baptism. The Diocese and its ministries have other meetings and processes where they consult and engage with people who are not Catholic. The Synod has an agenda and process that makes it different from these broad consultation processes.

All Synod members must see themselves, and be recognised by others, as having:

- active involvement in a parish, agency or ministry group within the diocese.
- a commitment to contributing to the Diocese becoming more Christ-like.
- a relationship with God and a commitment to discern prayerfully with others what God wants for the whole diocese.
- a striving to live the Gospel in their family, work, and community activities, i.e. being loving, forgiving, hospitable, compassionate, supportive of the poor, inclusive of all,
- a desire and ability to listen with an open mind and heart to, and weigh up, all that they hear especially within the parish or community they represent,
- an ability to fulfill the requirements of Synod Membership.

It is recognised that no one is perfect. Each one of us is on a life-long journey to be fully who God calls us to be. There are parts of our lives that, at times, are in need of conversion, just as there are parts of our Church that are in need of conversion and renewal.

REQUIREMENTS OF SYNOD MEMBERS

Synod members will be on a journey with each other and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit discern a future of the Church in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

All Synod members need to commit to:

- being open to the Holy Spirit in their personal prayer and through the Synod
- reading Synod documents to learn more about the needs of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle
- participating in formation and preparatory meetings

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- attending a commissioning ceremony to take place at a Mass at the Sacred Heart Cathedral (unless COVID restrictions require alternative arrangements)
- listening to and respecting the views of others and weighing up all one hears in order to discern what God wants
- working with others to build understanding and positive outcomes for the whole Diocese
- meeting with those who have discerned their attendance at Synod – especially in the six weekly reflection opportunities during Feb-March 2021 on the themes of the Synod
- participating in both full day sessions of the Synod:
 - Session 2 - Saturday 22 May 2021 and
 - Session 3 – Saturday 20 November 2021
- reporting back to one's parish, agency or group after each session of the Synod

While not wishing to over-exaggerate the commitment, it is necessary to point out that those who become Synod members will be expected to engage actively in processes leading up to, and during the Synod sessions.

All Synod members have a right and duty to participate in the sessions of Synod. If they are unable to attend a proxy cannot be sent in their place.

It is very helpful but is not essential that Synod members have an email address.

PROCESS FOR APPOINTMENT OF SYNOD MEMBERS

While Bishop Bill Wright must approve the membership of each person coming to the Synod, membership will be selected as follows.

A letter from Bishop Bill Wright inviting applications for membership of the Synod will be sent to individuals, parishes, agencies, groups, and ministries by January 2021. This letter will include:

- Bishop's Pastoral Letter on the Synod
- Composition of the Synod
- Characteristics of Synod Members
- Requirements of Synod Members
- Selection of Synod Members
- Appointment of Synod Members

Expressions of Interest (EOI) to be returned by 4 January 2021.

The Bishop, upon advice of the Diocesan Synod Working Party, can accept late EOI's if these address under-representation from initial expressions of interest. Late applicants still need to complete formation and other requirements expected of all Delegates.

The Synod Working Party will check that EOI forms contain all the relevant information. They will contact applicants if clarification is needed. The Synod Working Party will then provide Bishop Bill Wright with the list of the people for him to consider appointing as Synod members.

SELECTION OF SYNOD MEMBERS

The Instruction from Rome on Diocesan Synods *states that Canon 512 no 2 should be followed in so far as possible in the selection of members of the Synod.* Canon 512 no 2 states "The members of Christ's faithful assigned to the Pastoral Council are to be selected in such a way that the council truly reflects the entire portion of the People of God which constitutes the diocese, taking account of the different regions of the diocese, of social conditions and professions, and of the part played in the apostolate by the members, whether individually or in association with others".

People who are discerned by a community service, educational ministry or other group may be current staff, volunteers, students, participants, service users, or parents.

The Bishop will issue invitations to complete the Expression of Interest Form to:

- All active clergy of the diocese,
- Two representatives from the retired clergy,
- All members of the Council for Mission,
- Lay people officially engaged as chaplains or pastoral ministers,
- Diocesan Councils who will invite their membership to discern who will represent their Council,
- Religious Sisters/Brothers who will meet together to discern the required number of people,
- The parish leader who will invite parishioners to discern who will be invited to submit an application based on one person per 100 Mass attendance (2016 Mass Count).
If this is not possible the Parish Leader will invite any parishioner to submit their interest in participating in the Synod. They (preferably with the assistance of members of the Parish Pastoral Council) will discern equal numbers of men and women,
- Each primary school leadership team who will invite their staff and parent body to discern the person/s to be invited (it is important that they be seen as part of the parish delegation),
- Each secondary school leadership team who will invite their staff and parent body to discern the person/s to be invited,
- Each secondary school leadership team (preferably with the advice of the student leadership team) who will be invited to discern one per 200 students comprising equal numbers of male and female students, from Years 10, 11 and 12, to be invited to complete an Expression of Interest Form together with their parent/guardian,
- The leadership team of St Nicholas who, with the advice of staff and parents/carers, will discern up to 8 people who will hear the voice of their community,
- The leadership team of CatholicCare who will discern up to 8 people from staff and people they serve who will hear the voice of their community,
- The members of the Operations Management Group of the diocese,
- Each Catholic cultural group operating within the diocese who will discern 1 man and 1 woman,
- The staff from Healing and Support (Zimmerman Service) who will discern with their clients, people to be invited to attend the synod,

- Each Catholic ministry operating in the Diocese but governed by other Church authorities, who will discern representatives,
- Each Catholic movement operating in the Diocese who will discern their representative.

It is understood that the majority of Synod members will come from parishes, ministry groups and agencies, wearing more than one hat, in order to represent the many aspects of our diocese as a community of communities.

ROLE OF A DELEGATE

While delegates represent their community or parish, it is not in the sense of a “political liaison” between Synod and constituency. Their role is not to lobby for a geographic or interest group as in a political gathering, but to ensure that the concerns, observations and needs of the whole diocesan community are presented to the Synod, and to report back to the parish, agency or community that discerned their attendance. To assist with this each Synod Member is invited on a personal formation journey to ascertain a better understanding of the diocese and one’s own faith.

APPOINTMENT OF SYNOD MEMBERS

By mid-January 2021, Bishop Bill Wright will formally write to all those discerned to participate in the Synod. In that letter he will inform them of the basis for their invitation.

All must write/email Bishop Bill Wright to inform him of their acceptance or non-acceptance of this invitation by the end of January 2021

SYNOD OBSERVERS

Observers will be invited from Christian churches and other faith traditions with a close connection to the Diocese.

Notes:





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