

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.

In convoking the Synod, I am mindful of Pope Francis' desire 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 of 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 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."

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

³ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 33, 2015

⁴ *Ibid* 33

“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. MEMBERSHIP OF THE SYNOD

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.

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, as ecclesial officers, shall make the Profession of Faith and an Oath of Fidelity.

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

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

The diocesan Bishop may invite to the diocesan Synod as observers some ministers or members of Churches or ecclesial communities which are not in full communion with the Catholic Church, but who can play an important role in the renewal of the Catholic Church.

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. 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/Sarah James (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*),
- 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.

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

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 local 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 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.

Prayer promoting the success of the Synod shall 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 of 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:

1. Identity and Community
2. Worship and Prayer
3. Formation and Education
4. Mission and Outreach
5. 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.