

SYNOD OF BISHOPS

Diocesan Synthesis

Archdiocese of Perth



ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF PERTH

SYNTHESIS FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

INTRODUCTION

The Archdiocese of Perth, Western Australia has engaged with the Synod of Bishops on Synodality following an extensive process of engagement and consultation for the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia.

During this Plenary Council process, the Archdiocese of Perth established a group of approximately three hundred “animators” as key facilitators of engagement and communication in each parish and many entities such as archdiocesan agencies. Other larger entities such as major health care providers and Catholic Education providers were in a position to commit the extensive resources at their disposal to this process.

Plenary Council Submissions

At the close of the survey on 13 March 2019 a total of 1,601 submissions were received after the Listening and Dialogue process. 519 submissions were from groups or organisations and 1,082 submissions were from individuals. There were 11,542 people represented through the 519 groups.

Overall, the total number of respondents from the Archdiocese of Perth was 12,624.

Synod of Bishops Participation

There were 68 completed responses from the Archdiocese of Perth. 22 of these came from groups, organisations, or families. 46 submissions were made by individuals.

A key part of the Plenary Council process has been the emphasis on prayer and discernment. This has meant that those engaging with the Synod of Bishops on Synodality, were already well versed in the process proposed in its documentation. This then meant that those who engaged with the process were able to do so already understanding the commitment required to enter a deeper discernment of the issues discussed and of the importance of respectful discussions. The similarity in the processes used in the Plenary Council and the Synod of Bishops on Synodality proved to be a strength of the overall experience for participants.

One of the challenges that arose during the consultation phase for the Synod was that many people stated that they had only recently undertaken a similar exercise for the Plenary Council and were not so motivated to repeat a similar process. In addition, COVID restrictions and associated health concerns resulted in people being reluctant to gather in groups in many instances. In some instances, there was a degree of both Plenary and COVID weariness that made it a challenge to engage people in this process.

The general principle adopted by the Archdiocese of Perth was to make the resources prepared for the Synod of Bishops on Synodality available as widely as possible and to encourage people to participate to the extent that it was possible for them to do so. The first line of communication and engagement had been with our parishes, priests, deacons and agencies.

The communications resources of the Archdiocese were also used to promote the Synod of Bishops on Synodality widely. This included articles in the main weekly news publication of the Archdiocese as well as social media.

The liturgical resources provided as part of the process were well received and utilised in many situations.

While the volume of submissions has not been as great as the Plenary Council process, participants have appreciated the opportunity to participate in a worldwide endeavour. Many saw the process as a complementary extension of the Plenary Council process. The content of the Listening and Dialogue phase of the Plenary Council has also been used to inform the content of the synthesis from the Archdiocese.

SYNTHESIS OF THE VOICES HEARD IN THE DISCERNMENT PHASE

Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC)

There were several references made advocating the establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council. This was also a theme that was mirrored in submissions to the Plenary Council process. A Diocesan Plenary Council was seen as an attempt to promote a greater emphasis, focus and awareness on the pastoral dimension of the Archdiocese.

“We urge all bishops to follow the instructions of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Canon Law and immediately establish their Diocesan Pastoral Council. This would spread the burdens of office more broadly among their People, and engender a spirit of openness, transparency and accountability.”

The membership of this group (DPC) was also mentioned, with the need for to ensure that there was a balance of women and men, lay and clergy, age, and cultural diversity. A DPC should reflect the face of the People of God within our city, parishes, and archdiocese.

A DPC is also seen as an opportunity to involve more lay people, especially women in leadership and decision-making roles at a senior level in the Archdiocese. A DPC is seen as an example of a Synodal approach to pastoral innovation and leadership.

Ongoing training and development for the members of a Diocesan Pastoral Council was seen as a crucial.

Parish Pastoral Councils (PPC)

The use and operation of Parish Pastoral was referenced in several submissions. Once again, this was seen as one way of ensuring that there was an opportunity for lay people to be actively involved in setting a vision for the parish, engaging with the wider community, and supporting the parish priest. It was seen as a way of improving decision making, ensuring it was more equitably shared and was more transparent.

A recurring theme was to ensure that there was transparent accountability including financial accountability for any decisions taken especially where long term commitments were being made for the parish. The PPC placed the responsibility of the pastoral outreach of a parish more broadly among the parish community, with the community setting the agenda. This was seen as important particularly when a new Parish Priest is appointed. Examples were given of new Parish Priests disenfranchising the local parish leadership.

Most respondents wanted to ensure that the model of synodality promoted during the Plenary Council and the Synod of Bishops process (listening and discernment), be adopted in the parish especially by parish councils and in decision making generally.

Once again, ongoing formation was seen as vital to ensuring that all members understood their roles and responsibilities, praying, listening, and discerning.

Governance, Transparency, Accountability

There were several references in the submissions regarding a perceived failure to properly account for actions that may or may not have been taken in the past. Reference was made to the *Light from the Southern Cross Report*. This was seen as a very significant document pointing the way towards a model for the future in which many of the current Church structures could be amended for the better. The synodal approach was expressed and recommended as a good way to begin to reform governance in all areas of the church.

Some saw this as an opportunity to “*reset the structures and processes of the administration bodies of the Church at all levels, to ensure open receptivity and eloquent reflections of our identity as People of God and Disciples of Jesus.*” The opportunity for “*participation in co-responsible governance*” was also seen as an opportunity to be taken up and progressed now and into the future.

Several submissions made the point that while many lay people, including women, had developed significant leadership and management skills, there was a need to ensure that ongoing formation and training was embedded in future arrangements. The adoption of codes of conduct for all levels of leadership and governance was seen as very important including at a local church level.

Inclusivity and Reaching Out to Those on the Margins

A general theme across many of the submissions referred to ensuring that the Church was seen to act in ways that reached out to the most vulnerable in our society, to be “*a more inclusive church, a more welcoming and non-judgemental church reaching out as we listen to the cry of the poor and vulnerable in our midst*”.

This reference was made towards a very diverse group of people including, but not limited to, people with disabilities, those with mental health issues, the poor, homeless, single parents, drug addicted, jobless and refugees. We could now add those impacted by natural disasters and COVID.

There was reference to reaching out to “*the little ones*” of the Gospel. Mention was made on more than one occasion of the challenges faced by the divorced, remarried couples, members of the LGBTQI community. One group highlighted the importance of accompanying these people as advocated by Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia*. Many of these groups can feel rejected or abandoned by the church at the most difficult moments of their lives.

There was a challenge made for the Church to return to its roots of being openly warm and inclusive and to return to the vision of Vatican II.

Finally in this area there was a call to be faithful to the call of Pope Francis to be a more outward looking church, rather than being inward looking. “*Speaking to participants taking*

part in this International Meeting organized by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, he said, "We need a free and simple Church, which does not think of looking good, of convenience and of entrances, but outward looking".

Recruitment and Training of Clergy

There were several submissions dealing with the recruitment and training of priests. Mention was also made of the proper supervision of priests. Given the steps taken in the Archdiocese of Perth to implement an independent supervision model for clergy, no further comment is required on this matter at this time. Supervision also leads to greater accountability.

There was also a call for greater and more specific training to be provided in pastoral leadership, in sharing governance and to be more consultative in decision making. These skills should be encouraged and developed prior to ordination, beginning in the seminary, and modelled by good Parish Priests in the early appointments of clergy.

Role of Women

There were numerous references in the submissions to the role of women in the Church as a whole, in addition to the references to those above in Governance, Transparency and Accountability.

There was reference made to the skills of religious women, women theologians and highly educated women and a call to treat women and men equally in ministry, governance and responsibility. A call was made to achieve a better balance of numbers on decision making groups at both diocesan and parish level.

There was also a call made to acknowledge that women are the mainstay of the current church in so many ways – as volunteers, as loyal parishioners active in works of mercy in the Church. *"Women need to be recognised and welcomed as genuine ministers of the gospel and for the sensitivity and intuition they bring to mission."*

Finally, there was a call to listen to the hopes and experiences of women in the church and to provide opportunities to hear the female voice in homilies.

One submission summarised the contributions of made on this topic.

"A synodal Church would be an open, welcoming church; a church where lay women and lay men could serve in liturgy, governance, priestly and parish formation according to their abilities. The gifts of women are being overlooked in current Church structures even though the many and varied women's roles in the Church are comparable to the work of ordained ministers."

There was reference made to female religious orders who seem to be well formed in the methods of discernment and synodality through their community Chapter processes. The Church could learn from this. Also, a call for a greater acknowledgement of the role of female religious in ministering to the fringes of society.

Ordination to Diaconate & Priesthood

There were a few references in the submissions to ordination to the priesthood. These typically referred to ordination being open to married men, and for women to be considered for ordination to Diaconate.

Acolytes

The role of acolytes within the archdiocese was discussed on several occasions. The submissions highlighted the diversity within the archdiocese ranging from no acolytes in some parishes to in other places acolytes almost taking on clerical roles. Several submissions noted that Pope Francis has opened up the lay ministry of Acolyte to women and that this should be actively promoted in the Archdiocese of Perth. It is an expression of the priestly ministry all share in by virtue of baptism. It would speak strongly to inclusivity and participation, major themes of synodality.

Permanent Diaconate

There was reference to this role being expanded to women candidates as noted above. There was awareness of Pope Francis initiating research into this matter and that the outcome of this would be of great interest to many people.

There was a view expressed that permanent deacons working in parishes were more in touch with the day to day lives of people and that this was often reflected in their preaching.

The Sacrament of Penance

The availability of the Sacrament of Penance was discussed on a number of occasions in the submissions. Proposals centred on finding ways to make the sacrament more readily available to people to re-engage them in the life of the Church. It was noted that there is a crisis in the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and that maybe a synodal approach (Prayer Listening and Discernment) to this situation would be a beneficial way forward. There were also some voices indicating the need to be stricter in the celebration and practise of this sacrament. Also indicated was a need for a modern catechesis on sin.

There was a call for the Third Rite of Reconciliation to be offered as one way to reconnect people with the sacrament and a way to reconnect with the 1st and 2nd rites of the sacrament

Traditional Latin Mass (TLM)

There were several submissions regarding this matter. *Traditionis Custodes* has been promulgated by Pope Francis and informs the liturgical issues and responses raised in the submissions.

Submissions from the TLM group indicated they saw themselves as a marginalised group in the Church. Most saw themselves as loyal members of the Church, adhering to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council but preferring the pre-conciliar Mass. A consultation within the Archdiocese requested by the Archbishop in response to *Traditiones Custodis* indicated that many young families were attracted to the TLM because of a strong sense of community and family support. A strong sense of being with other like-minded people and in particular young married couples, often not seen or acknowledged in the local

parish. Devotion to the Eucharist was expressed as important for this group and sense that they are like a faithful remnant. In their submissions some saw synodality as usurping the role and place of the bishop and or priest and the place of the magisterium.

First Nations People

Some reference was made to the need for the church to better engage with First Nations people regarding their spiritual tradition and in the delivery of services to those in greatest need.

There was also a call for a greater and more public effort to be made to acknowledge the hurts and disenfranchisement from the Church for actions in the past. The need to listen to the lived experiences of people was seen as critical. It was noted that an integral part of indigenous culture is sitting, listening, and passing on story. The beginnings of synodality maybe!

Sexual Abuse Crisis

There was reference made in the submissions to matters of transparency and accountability around sexual abuse. There was also referenced a need to continue to care for those who suffer because of abuse. This issue was also linked in some submissions to inclusiveness and accountability.

Youth/ Young Adult Engagement

The alienation of youth and young adults from the life of the Church was a concern for a several respondents. There were no concrete proposals put forward to address this matter. How do we reach out to the young? How do we reach out to families? How do we reengage those Catholics who have left? It was expressed that this is something that has caused great pain and anxiety for families. It was hoped that some discernment and a way forward for youth engagement would be forthcoming from the Plenary Council. This is acknowledging that it requires the discernment of the whole church in Australia.

A young person participating stated *“Our voices are never heard; we are never treated as adults in my parish.”*

The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II)

There were several comments that sought to remind people of the need to continue with the implementation of the outcomes of Vatican II. There was a sense that this implementation has stalled and needs to be reinvigorated. Synodality flows from the theology of the Council.

“Pope Francis said that now, more than 50 years after the council concluded its work, “it is necessary to make more explicit the key concepts of Vatican II, the foundations of its arguments, its theological and pastoral horizon, the arguments, and the method it used.”

Catholic Schools

The role of Catholic schools and the pre-eminent role that they play in the life of the Church in Australia was mentioned in both the Plenary Council and the Synod of Bishops discernment submissions.

Some submissions highlighted the work of Catholic schools operating on the basis of co-responsibility with parents and of journeying together with parents in supporting them as the first educators of their children in faith.

Other submissions highlighted that for many Catholics the school was their only experience of Church and community. It was hoped that the Plenary Council might provide a way forward for schools, parishes, and families to work together.

CONCLUSIONS

The submissions that have been received from the Archdiocese of Perth have been carefully considered in the light of those that have also been previously submitted during the Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue process.

Most of the submissions were made under multiple or all themes. For ease of consideration, an attempt has been made to group conclusions under the three headings used in the Synod discernment process.

COMMUNION

Sexual Abuse Crisis, Acolytes, Recruitment and Training of Clergy, Sacrament of Reconciliation, Traditional Latin Mass (TLM)

The submissions acknowledged that a significant amount of work had been done to address the findings of the Royal Commission. It was also acknowledged that significant resources had been committed to this area to support the victims of abuse and their families.

This was seen to be an ongoing requirement. Most significantly, there was identified a need to continue to learn from the mistakes of the past so that these were not repeated in the future.

The role of acolyte was seen as one way of involving both lay men and women in a legitimate and significant way in the sacramental life of the church. mention was made that Pope Francis has been leading the way in opening up these opportunities and that further research was being done in this matter.

The recruitment and training of clergy, together with their ongoing formation and training was seen as a priority for the future. The ongoing holistic support for clergy was also seen as a priority. The Archdiocese of Perth has already invested significantly in this area. It appears that most people are unaware of this, and a commitment will need to be made to inform the wider community of this.

The wider use of the Third Rite of Reconciliation was a recurring theme in both the Plenary Council and Synod of Bishops processes. This was often proposed as a way of re-engaging people with the sacrament. There was little understanding demonstrated of the circumstances under which the Rite can be used, rather, it appeared to be proposed as a stop gap measure to arrest the decline of participation in the Sacrament of Penance.

In order to address this matter, consideration may need to be given to implementing programs or initiatives that inform the community about the various Rites of Reconciliation and when they can be used.

Finally, there were a few strongly worded submissions made in the promotion of the Traditional Latin Mass. Given the significant work that has been undertaken in this area in the Archdiocese of Perth, communicating this to the wider community may need to be considered.

PARTICIPATION

Youth/Young Adult Engagement, Diocesan Pastoral Council, Parish Pastoral Councils, Governance, Transparency, Accountability, Role of Women, Ordination to Diaconate & Priesthood, Permanent Diaconate

The role of women in the life of the church has also received very significant attention in both the Plenary Council and Synod of Bishops submissions from the Archdiocese of Perth. There has been a consistent theme of involving women in the liturgical life of the church as well as more prominently in decision making roles at all levels of the Archdiocese.

While there have been some calls for the ordination of women, greater emphasis has been given to consideration for participation as acolytes and to a lesser degree, as deacons.

The improvement of governance structures together with improved transparency and accountability has been a recurring theme. While respecting the specific requirements of Canon Law, there have been consistent calls for the adoption of more rigorous standards sometimes found in the wider community. The training requirements for people taking on these roles have resource implications for the Archdiocese.

The establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council and the enhanced operation of Parish Pastoral Councils have also featured in submissions. Once again, these are seen as effective ways to increase the involvement of lay people, particularly women in responsible positions in the church.

The submissions regarding the ordained ministry have also been received multiple times. There will be a need to consider how to best deal with the expectations that people have regarding these matters and to inform them of the need for the Australian Catholic Church to be in communion with the Universal Church

MISSION

Catholic Schools, Vatican II, Inclusivity and Reaching Out to Those on the Margins, First Nations People

Catholic schools are seen as providing an essential service to Australian society and a pivotal way of encouraging parents to reconnect with the Catholic Church. They are seen as vital parts of the wider parish community and often as community hubs.

The Catholic Church is seen as doing significant work through its agencies in meeting the needs of those at the margins through its works of mercy.

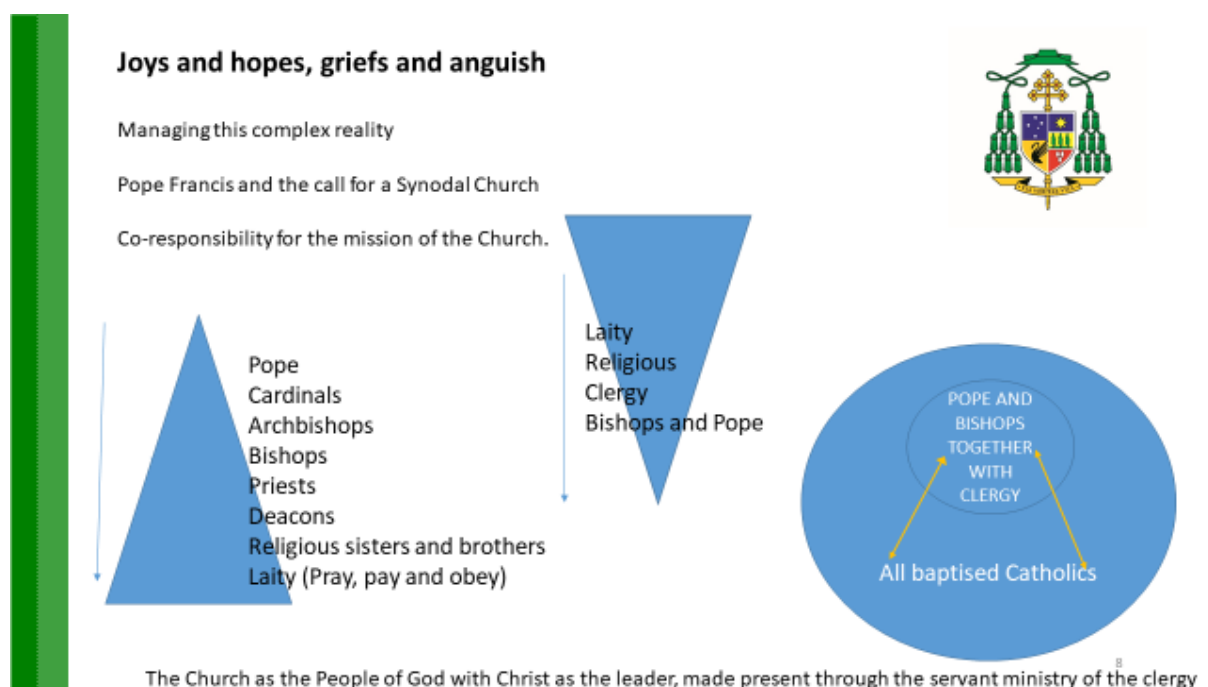
One area requiring careful consideration into the future is the outreach to the LGBTQI community. This will require sensitivity and careful consideration in order to respect the needs in the community.

The engagement with First Nations People has long been a priority for the Catholic Church. Its efforts in the areas of education and social outreach are long standing. Some emphasis was placed on deepening the engagement with spirituality and liturgy in this area.

Feedback from group leaders was generally positive throughout the process. Most leaders expressed that the synodal approach was used with ease and familiarity in groups, and this was due to the earlier experience of the listening and discernment phase of the Plenary Council. Most participants see this process of synodality as an essential way forward for the church and a response to the voice of the Spirit within the Church locally, nationally, and universally.

On a personal level the diocesan contacts here in Perth were heartened that many were keen to have their voices and responses to the discernment questions heard and were supportive of the process. It indicates a great love for the church but also a desire to see the church flourish in the future. It fills us with hope.

On the 26th of April 2022, Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB in a presentation to the priests of the Archdiocese finished his presentation by highlighting the way that the Church understands herself, has expressed this understanding and is continuing to develop this understanding. He highlighted this development through the slide attached below. It is an example of the move to an understanding that we are all baptised in a church that is the People of God. It is an expression of the synodal approach.





For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

