



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SALE

Let's walk together

Diocesan Synthesis of the Consultations in the
Diocesan Phase of the Synod of Bishops 2021-2023



Plenary Council 2020
Listen to what the Spirit is saying...







INTRODUCTION

THE DIOCESAN SYNTHESIS

This synthesis from the Diocese of Sale, which we are pleased to submit to the Synod of Bishops, presents the voices of the People of God of this local church. We have engaged in deep listening, dialogue and discernment, in hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit through the voices of our people.

In the consultations that have taken place throughout our diocese and which have been submitted, we have heard from over 300 people, both from individual respondents and from group participants. Well over half the individual participants were female while 42 percent were male. Respondents ranged in age from 18 years to above 80 years. The greatest percentage of responses came from those above 60 years of age (58 %) with the next largest group aged 30 -59 years (over 38%). Less than 4% of our responses were submitted from young adults.

As we continue our synodal journey, Pope Francis reminds us that synodality is not a consensus of the majority, nor is it a programme to be implemented. Synodality is “a style to be assumed, in which the main protagonist is the Holy Spirit, who is expressed first and foremost in the Word of God, read, meditated upon and shared together.” [1]

ABOUT THE DIOCESE OF SALE

The Diocese of Sale encompasses the Gippsland region in the south-eastern part of Victoria with the rural city of Sale being geographically central and where the Cathedral is located. The Diocese stretches from the outer Melbourne south-eastern suburbs of Narre Warren, Berwick and Cranbourne in the west to the state border with New South Wales (NSW) in the east.

The Diocesan Offices are now located in Warragul, 110 km west of Sale and the bulk of the population is located in the western end of the Diocese in the dormitory suburbs of Melbourne.

The lands on which the Diocese is located form part of the ancestral lands of the First Nations people: the Gunai-Kurnai people of the Kulin nation in the central and eastern part of Gippsland and the Bunurong people of the South-Eastern Kulin Nation in west and south Gippsland. White settlers began to make their home in the region from the 1830 onwards, and those early communities were served by priests on horseback from the Monaro region of NSW.

The Diocese has 26 parishes, several of which are parishes-in-partnership, sharing the pastorship and administration of a priest, 38 primary schools and 7 secondary schools. At the 2016 Census 566,079 persons lived in the diocese, with 123,594 self-identified Catholic, with a little less than 10% of all Catholics attending Mass. [2] See appendix for map

We have a richly diverse community in the diocese, ranging from remote, rural and provincial areas to large parishes in the densely populated multicultural metropolitan communities.



[1] Pope Francis, Address to the Delegation of the Catholic Action Movement of France, 13 January 2022 www.vatican.va

[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census; National Count of Attendance 2016 (National Centre for Pastoral Research)

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

When Pope Francis announced the Synod of Bishops 2021-2023 on synodality, the Australian Catholic Church had already embarked on its own synodal path with the 2017 announcement, by the Australian Catholic Bishops, of a Plenary Council, the first since 1937. The journey towards the First Assembly of the Plenary Council would be marked by an extensive period of wide consultation, listening and dialogue. The First Assembly was held in October 2021, with the final day coinciding with Pope Francis' formal opening of the Synodal Path for the Universal Church. The Second and final Assembly of the 5th Plenary Council of Australia will be convened in July 2022. During this nearly five-year journey, the Australian Church, in its faith communities spread across our vast continent, has experienced various aspects of the synodal process, and that journey continues, now in the lead-up to the final Assembly of the Plenary Council and beyond into the future.

When the Synod was announced by Pope Francis, and in particular, the role expected of dioceses world-wide, there was considerable confusion among people, who found it difficult to make the distinction between the consultations for the Plenary Council and the fresh consultations asked for by the Synod. The explanation that the Plenary Council concerned the Australian church, while the Synod was the consultation of the entire universal church, helped to elicit better understanding of the two complementary processes. A time line linking the two together with a short explanatory video was made available via the national Catholic Bishops' website <https://www.catholic.org.au/synodalchurch>

The Diocese has had positive experiences of walking the synodal path together under the leadership of successive bishops. Our diocesan pastoral plan, *Journeying Together*, enacted in the early 2000s, was the result of hundreds of conversations, in listening and dialogue, similar to what we are now experiencing with the Plenary Council and the Synodal journey. Likewise, our Diocesan Assembly which was convened in 2019 as a local response to the Plenary Council, was also a time to listen intently to others, sharing our faith, hope and dreams for an invigorated Church. This synthesis is an expression of individual and communal discernment in both the recent Synodal consultations and the synodal journey undertaken in preparation for the Plenary Council. The fruits of listening, dialogue and discernment are described in the following pages and they reflect the authentic voices of our people in this Diocese.



OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE SYNODAL PROCESS

INVITATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Prior to Pope Francis' launch of the Synodal path on 10th October 2021, the Australian church was engaged in an intense period of prayer and preparation for the First Assembly of the Plenary Council (3-10 October 2021). In our Diocese, the preparation for the Synod commenced in late October – early November 2021. Together with weekly emails, flyers, invitations and bulletin notices, our diocese also developed a simpler conversation guide for informal use in family settings, with neighbours and friends and for school staff and older students. Our Coffee Conversations encouraged people to choose as many questions for discussion as they wished. Coffee Conversations was also adopted as an additional conversation resource for the Australian Church.

An attractive Diocesan Synod website was designed to inform people about the Synod and to invite them to engage with the Synod consultation either as individuals or as part of a group. [Diocese of Sale Synod of Bishops <https://www.cdsale.org.au/synod-of-bishops>]. The website offered a range of resources as well as enabling people to view the Synod questions and submit their responses via their mobile devices. Also available for downloading were week-by-week liturgy and prayer resources for Sunday Masses and for group or personal prayer from November 2021 through to the end of February 2022. These were developed in our Diocese and then made available to the national church via the Australian

Catholic Bishops Conference Synod of Bishops website. Included in the resources (which were emailed each week in addition to being on the website) were bulletin notices, a reflection on the Scripture for the day, petitions for General Intercessions, Quote of the Day from Pope Francis on synodality and PowerPoint slides for use at Mass and in prayer gatherings. The December resources focused on the Synod questions relating to Communion, while the themes of Participation and Mission were the foci for January and February respectively. A sample of the resources is included in the Appendices.

Several groups met to listen and discern, including some parish groups, diocesan agencies and councils. The Diocese offered several opportunities for conversations. These were held virtually via Zoom because of the difficulty of gathering people from such a widespread area. Parishes were regularly updated on the Synod and encouraged to hold local conversations with members of their communities. Judging from the submissions received by the Diocese and the deep engagement of people who did participate in the various discussions, there is a desire for the church to become much more synodal and to demonstrate that more visibly in all areas of church life. There are expressed wishes that the lay faithful exercise their God-given gifts for mission in a co-responsible manner with the clergy. People are longing for things to change, not by a sense of disappointment or regret, but with energy for good and meaningful change which will lead to a hope filled future where the Church's mission sends her outwards, to be agents of God's love to the world, especially to the most vulnerable and poor. People also need to hear of the good news stories and the transformational work being done, about which we are often slow to communicate.

CHALLENGES

Despite our best efforts, we encountered particular challenges in trying to reach out to our communities and especially to those on the margins and those whom we do not see at weekend Masses.

Firstly, the COVID pandemic threw up enormous difficulties in meeting face to face. Our State of Victoria endured an extremely difficult year in 2021 in that it suffered multiple and lengthy lockdowns, much longer and more severe than the rest of Australia. The strict curfew and lock down conditions saw drastic restrictions on activity outside the home and the cessation of parish liturgies for weeks on end, during several periods during 2021. In early 2022, as the Omicron variant took hold in the community, we were once again in strict lockdown, and as restrictions slowly eased after six weeks, people began cautiously returning to physical workplaces and churches began to re-open once again. The overwhelming feeling for our people after six periods of lockdowns, some of them months long, was that of utter exhaustion. Mental health issues, financial stress and loss of income made people's lives very challenging. It was difficult, therefore, for people to get enthused about gathering for conversations about synodality when parishes were still struggling to get back to some semblance of normality. The same can be said for schools, enduring a very disruptive time with classes on line and no physical community with which to gather. It is worth noting that the First Assembly of the Plenary Council, which was due to be held in person in 2020, had been delayed for a year by the pandemic and was eventually held as a virtual gathering in October 2021.

The second challenge concerned the very short time frame for diocesan consultations. In Australia, the First Assembly of the Plenary Council had just been completed when we were launched straight into another preparation period, this time for the Synod. This period of consultation was to extend from November 2021 until the end of February 2021. With a gradual emerging from lockdown in the State

of Victoria in November, and the resultant busy rush just before Christmas, parishes were not in the best position to do much in the way of gatherings and discussion. In Australia, January is generally regarded as a fallow time, as this is the main summer break for schools and families. February saw much more activity in parishes as the new school year commenced and people returned from holidays. During the entire consultation time, the diocese provided discussion and prayer resources with regular communications and invitation to engage with the synodal process within their families and community. Trying to make connections with those outside of our community proved difficult. This is something that we will need to work on and develop further, both in local communities and at a diocesan level. There needs to be a commitment to establish and develop ways of reaching out to people, whether it be directly from our parishes, through our schools, hospitals and aged care, to working with other churches and organisations who already have those networks and connections.

The third challenge, in launching the synodal consultation within the diocese, was that people were confused about the Synod and thought that it was yet another round of consultation with similar discussion points that had emerged from the Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue phase. There was some frustration expressed that some of the critical things that had already been raised in the Plenary Council discussions did not surface at all during the proceedings of the Plenary Council's First Assembly and because of that, scepticism about the value of doing it all over again in the Synod consultation was a very real issue. In explaining the overlap between the Plenary Council and Synod discussions, it was pointed out that the Plenary was an experience of the local church while the Synodal Path involved the entire universal Church. From her lived experience of the past several years in journeying towards the Plenary Council, the Australian Church has a significant contribution to make towards a better understanding of synodality and its importance for renewal of the universal church.

Our Bishop, Gregory Bennet, has been a positive presence during the Synod consultation period with his invitation and encouragement to the Diocesan community. His hope for our Diocese, is that "as we emerge out of COVID, could this synodal journey be a way for us to welcome, gather and listen to one another?" He is supported by the Diocesan Gaudium et Spes Plenary Committee, which has driven the Plenary Council engagement within the Diocese and is now doing likewise for the Synod Consultation.

In the following discussion on the submissions received, there is a palpable sense of people wanting to have trust in a faith-filled future, working together for the change that is needed to transform our church, and holding the hope that our clergy and leaders will listen and heed the deep desires of people expressed in this Synod consultation and in Plenary Council discussions.

Throughout the Plenary Council process, for our Diocesan Assembly and now, in this period of Diocesan consultation for the Synod, there have been hundreds of conversations taking place in the Diocese, in parishes and schools, in councils and agencies, in prayer groups and homes and in informal settings. Much of that discussion was initiated by the Plenary Council journey which has continued since 2018. Although we noted less involvement in the Synod consultations, the material from the Plenary Council listening and dialogue is complementary to the Synod process and thus provides an important perspective. Viewed together, these personal stories and group responses give us an important window into the desires, hopes and disappointments of our people. The next section will explore these in greater detail.



EXPRESSING OUR HOPES AND DESIRES

As expected, there was a large range of topics that raised in various conversations. What has become apparent is a strong sense of the need for change and transformation both in the church's attitudes and its structures, hierarchy and decision making processes.

TRANSFORMATION AND GROWTH

There has been appreciation of the good things that are happening in our diocese, and a desire to affirm our clergy and people in trying to live the Christian life as faithful disciples.

"Parishes, clergy, schools and laypeople are doing wonderful things across the Diocese. There are very generous clergy and laypeople who have committed to their faith and doing what they can within their skill set and interest and love of their faith. Let's not get caught up with the negative issues that seem to be key to some. Over time a lot has been achieved and we should be very proud. New faces emerge with a commitment to make valuable contributions and inspire those of us who have been doing things for a long time."

There is a sense of urgency that emerges from our respondents, expressing the yearning for a more energised church, a church that recognises its past failings, a church that is willing to listen, to be more humble and to be more faithful to the Gospel values. There is also impatience and frustration with outdated governance and decision-making structures which become barriers to co-responsible sharing in the church's mission.

Of particular note are the many and repeated calls for the Church to be much more pro-active in giving women recognition and equality in the life and mission of the church. There is also pessimism and scepticism, in some quarters, about whether the church has the will or the capacity to respond healthily to change for the sake of mission. Some fear that if nothing comes forth from the many conversations, diocesan gatherings, Plenary sessions and the Synod itself, then the Church will face a worse crisis than she is in now, with disaffected Catholics leaving in droves, either abandoning their Christian faith altogether or to find some other church in which they experience belonging. Our respondents want the church, that is, all of the baptised – our leaders and the entire community, to be courageous and adventurous, taking risks for the sake of proclaiming the joyful news of God's kingdom, being the face of hope and reassurance for those who have been excluded and the hands of care for those who most need God's healing. We would do well to learn from the lives of the saints, particularly heeding the example of our own Australian saint, Mary of the Cross (Courage, courage trust in God who helps you in all things. Mary MacKillop 1874)



THE SYNOD THEME OF COMMUNION

Developing stronger communities that are more inclusive and welcoming is a priority for many respondents. There was affirmation that in certain areas, Catholics do journey well with each other. People appreciated the effort and care with which members of their community listened to others. People cited examples of parish community life, particularly in relation to certain groups and organisations that were attentive to the voices of others. The St Vincent de Paul organisation, hospitals and chaplaincies were particularly mentioned as shining examples of this. Movements such as Divine Renovation and the Alpha program were cited as positive ways in which parishes exercised their mission and outreach. Catholic schools were also commended as places of welcome and connection for staff, students and their families. In particular, preparations for Sacraments are graced opportunities to develop stronger connections with young candidates and their parents, to invite support and affirmation from the parish community and to celebrate the Sacraments with joy and praise. Chaplaincies were affirmed as a great example of being present to others.

Other submissions mentioned that our walking with one another depends on who is included but that we consciously, or by omission, excluded a lot of people. We can at times be harsh and judgemental, excluding people instead of being receptive and listening deeply to them. At times the Church can seem out of touch with what is happening in society, and the hierarchy have lost connection with their flock.

“I think that in some cases we listen, but there are a lot of people out there who are not listened to. For example, the divorced, the gay community and the refugees. We say they are welcome, but they are not there. Our parishes are not reaching out to those people. Also, the young people who are not coming to Mass, is it because they find the Mass is not fulfilling their need. Are we listening to them?”

At times, and on different issues, the Church appears to be divided, with people's views in opposition to each other.

“When varying perspectives on an issue arises, we struggle to manage them as we do not handle difference of opinion well. We have to find ways to welcome diversity and a range of views and opinions. We all matter.”

There was broad consensus that people want to be asked, and expect to be consulted about life in the Church. While many appear happy with the status quo and their weekly one-hour commitment for Mass, others want to invest more of themselves in the life of the parish. They are excited about the possibilities for change but express disappointment when their ideas, skills and initiatives are ignored or dismissed. People wish to contribute and they desire their communities to be more energised, life-giving, responsive to the needs of the community. The journey of the Plenary Council has been an incredibly enlivening experience for many and there are high hopes for this to continue. Taking the synodal path demands that we play our part in the life of the Church. Do we know this and do we take our baptismal call seriously?

The scandal of child sexual abuse, exposed by the Royal Commission, has caused unimaginable damage to individuals, their families and indeed to the whole Australian church from the leadership to the laity. There has been a serious erosion of trust in Church leadership and our communities have suffered significant collateral damage because of it. It is of paramount importance that the Church acknowledges the gross failure of its leadership and works hard to restore trust, transparency and integrity.

People also noted the importance of good liturgical celebrations to foster and develop communities for mission beyond the Mass-going assembly and the parish. People valued Scripture reflections and personal sharing of faith. This was more apparent in smaller, more remote communities which did not have access to a priest each week. These celebrations required shared liturgical leadership and commitment by the community. Providing formation for our people is critical to deeper faith and developing our communities for mission. Clergy, pastoral councils, lay leaders in parishes, in particular, need access to sound formation. There is a common sentiment that people desire a greater sense of community in which to live their Christian calling. They want to do more but many are uncertain how this might happen. Are our parishes places where people are actively encouraged to use their gifts and charisms?

In reflecting on the theme of communion, there was significant mention of those who are largely absent from our churches: the young, those who don't feel welcome in the Church because of their lifestyle or circumstances, those who are disaffected or disillusioned and those who have stopped caring. Their absence impoverishes us as the Body of Christ and we are charged to find ways to include and welcome them. The pandemic has exposed huge fissures in Church life that were there previously but are now laid bare. As people return to physical worship and community gatherings, we need to ask ourselves what are we welcoming people into or back to? We cannot pretend that things will return to the way they used to be. Many have stopped coming to Mass because they have found more nourishment and connection with online worshipping communities, or have become used to not attending worship at all. Have we taken the time to ask people about their experiences of loss and hardship over the past two years? Have we been there pastorally for our people?



THE SYNOD THEME OF PARTICIPATION

All the baptised are called to participate in the life of the Church. There was strong agreement for the need for greater participation, but frustration expressed about power struggles between clergy and lay people, the unwillingness to allow lay people to take initiatives and the resistance to shared decision-making. The question "How do we encourage lay involvement, participation and leadership?" was addressed in several responses. There was appreciation for the leadership demonstrated by our Diocesan Gaudium et Spes Plenary Team which has led the Diocese pastorally through the Plenary Council journey.

CO-RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP

The voices from our submissions are calling for parish reformation: in structure and responsibility, leadership and power, intentionality and focus. In the words of the Second Vatican Council about involvement in the sacred liturgy we need "full, active and conscious participation" in the fruitful life of the parish by all. It is obvious that

"There is a huge need for a change from monologue to dialogue at every level of the Church. The Church also needs to be more transparent. There is sometimes a reluctance by clergy in allowing lay people to be too involved and there is some wariness on them taking initiatives. Shared decision making should be modelled by the Pastoral Council."

The challenge in owning a shared leadership is that while some clergy are reluctant to release their hold on decision making, laity must also commit and undertake the responsibilities required of them. Shared leadership is based on a relationship of equals through our common baptism.

Encouraging and inviting people into a ministry of discipleship needs to be intentional and personal. This has to be done by keeping our eyes and ears open to recognise the gifts and talents of others. Creating spaces and opportunities to empower people: using programs such as Called and Gifted (Catherine of Siena Institute) and the Alpha program helps improve involvement, confidence and self-worth. Formation for people is also critical to developing stronger participation. Many congregations are growing older, more tired and more disillusioned. Communities want to enthuse those people who are currently just committing one hour a week at Mass to more intentional discipleship.

"How do we encourage lay involvement and leadership in our parishes? I feel frustrated by this, as someone who is involved in organising rosters for parish liturgies, Communion to nursing homes, I find people are not willing to put their hand up and come forward to participate in these ministries."

Formation is mentioned in several contexts throughout the submissions. It was noted that formation is often fragmented and not consistent and that all levels of the church need access to quality formation: clergy, lay pastoral leaders, parents, students and young people who have left school.

There is a pressing need to explore and develop a variety of leadership contexts and attributes. We need to be more consultative and just not listen to the loudest voice alone. This requires effective communication with all sectors of the community.

"There should be no doubting the fact that the Holy Spirit whispers to each one of us and not just to a chosen few."

Parish/Diocesan Pastoral Councils are critical to the model of co-responsible and transparent leadership. They should have equal canonical standing with the Parish/Diocesan Finance Council, so that the relationships between them witness and meaning to shared leadership. Parish/Diocesan consultation provides a critical opportunity for all people to have their voices heard.

"We can encourage people to participate in the life of the Church by asking them where they believe change needs to occur and how they might be part of that. If people believe they will be listened to, then they are more willing to invest and contribute. We engage in decision making by the process of authentic discernment, attempting to understand how the Holy Spirit guides us to understand the mind of God and where God is leading us. Through discerning together, with open hearts, we might be led to make decisions that are authentic and for the pastoral good of all."

There was significant mention in a small number of submissions about the need for ecumenical collaboration and the sharing of worship and Christian life. While this concern may not seem at the forefront of parish priorities, for many of our smaller rural and remote communities have this concern. The joining together of tiny communities for shared worship, the gathering of groups for joint pastoral care or community projects is worthy of consideration. There is much goodwill and community spirit that is evident in these places and community connections are strong and well developed.

The Synodal way leads us to make decisions by discerning what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community. We are much better now at achieving this than before. We still have a long way to go. We need to improve our efforts in encouraging the clergy and the community to discern the way forward together.

LITURGY AND PRAYER

Liturgy is the heart of the Church's life and mission, the most profound expression of who we are as the body of Christ. Vibrant liturgical celebrations have the power to transform us, deepen our faith and our identity as Christ's disciples and equip us for mission in the world.

Liturgy is impoverished when translations fall short of expressing mystery, beauty and truth in the vernacular language of the people. Slavish adherence to literal translations from the Latin editio typica, often fail to express the text, and due not render due to the genius of the vernacular language with its poetic and descriptive power.

Language has the potential to be incredibly powerful but also highly damaging. One submission highlighted some pressing concerns about the translation of Divine Office prayer texts and the existence of unsuitable scripture texts demeaning women that are still part of the Office readings.

"Great effort has been made to incorporate inclusive language into liturgies, but the Divine Office, which is compulsory reading for the ordained, has not been reviewed. Our language reflects our beliefs, and it also has the ability to form belief. Maintaining male gendered nouns and pronouns maintains a gendered understanding of who is important in the Church. The Office of Readings is the only liturgy that incorporates readings outside the Bible, but the overwhelming majority of the readings are authored by men. The wisdom and insights of women are token. Female authors of hymns, poems and theological reflections need to form a vital part of the Divine Office."

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

There are consistent calls for the Church to be much more proactive in enabling women's full participation. There is growing impatience that the Church is out of step with society when it concerns the meaningful involvement of women. It is often difficult for men to see the obstacles and challenges that women have to face, dealing as they do with patriarchal structures in the church and all too often in the workplace and the general community. Lay women and also lay men are excluded from definitive decision-making within the church. They are not able to participate more fully in church governance because deliberative votes are the preserve of the ordained, who may or may not be attentive to the counsel given to them by their lay faithful. The Light on the Southern Cross has mentioned this as an area of much needed reform.

Female participation in Sunday Mass at about 60% and women make up the majority of paid and volunteer positions in many Diocesan offices, parishes, schools and church agencies. One submission offered a heartfelt plea to the Church to address the issue of wage parity for women in paid positions within the Church. Most of the paid positions in parishes are filled by women. As parish workers and pastoral associates, they often accept lower pay and have to deal with unrealistic work expectations by clergy and the community alike. They are expected to cope with any additional task that is given to them, often with no paid overtime. Parish roles need to be clear and well defined for the benefit of both staff and employer.

"Canon Code 1286 states that administrators "are to pay a just and decent wage to employees so that they are able to provide fittingly for their own needs and those of their dependents." In my experience the Church does not do this. If this was only my experience, I would put it down to a misguided parish priest and parish finance committee. [Many] people told me their stories – they are similar to mine. How can we, as church, tell others to pay people properly and to value workers when we do not value our own staff?"

Much has been said about the participation (or lack of it) of women in the ordained ministry. There is a growing cohort of Catholic men, women and clergy who want to see serious consideration of the permanent Diaconate being open to women. Some have also expressed a desire for women being ordained to the priesthood, while others oppose this view.

"It has become vital for the role of women in Church leadership be recognized and enhanced including fresh consideration of their ordination to Diaconate and Priesthood."

There are female members of our Church who experience a strong call to ordination and they desire to be servant ministers to communities in much the same way that some of the women leaders of the early church exercised ministry and leadership in their communities. The restriction placed on the Church regarding the discussion and consideration of women's ordination by Pope John Paul II, seems hardly relevant in these times. People want to speak freely and with passion about all areas of the church in which they have interest. They want their views to be treated with respect and not dismissed out of hand. Several respondents spoke passionately about the obstacles to authentic participation. They are very concerned about the discontinuation of the communal Sacrament of reconciliation, the banning of discussion of matters such as women's ordination, the amalgamation of parishes due to a shortage of clergy, the tolerance of practices which reinforce clericalism. Although Pope Francis is a strong advocate for walking synodally, some sectors of the Church are reticent to embrace this way of being Church, with many resistant to change, holding on to power and authority and placing obstacles in the way of co-responsible pastoral action and decision-making.



THE SYNOD THEME OF MISSION

"The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties [...] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts." [3] The opening paragraph of *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Modern World sums up the locus of the Church's mission. The Church shows its respect and love for the entire human family and stands in solidarity with humanity by engaging in conversation about the various problems that afflict our society. [4] The Church brings the light of the Gospel to illuminate the lives of the people she encounters.

Much has been said about the mission of the Church, and suggestions for how our church, here in the Diocese of Sale, could become more truly present to people from every situation and background. Our diocesan parishes, particularly the large parishes on the suburban fringe are places of great diversity both in language, ethnicity, expression of faith and devotional and liturgical practices. Such diversity adds richness to our Catholic family and is to be embraced.

While discussion on the theme of Mission generated fewer responses than those of Communion and Participation, the strong views expressed therein demonstrate people's desire for the Church to be more missional, a Church with a preferential option for the poor, a Church that Pope Francis describes in *Evangelii Gaudium* as a "field hospital."

Both the Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue conversations and the Synod consultations articulated overwhelming support for the inclusion of those on the margins. There was explicit mention of the people who are overlooked, excluded or in most need of pastoral care, support and welcome. These include our youth and young people, the LBTQI+ community, migrants and refugees, those living in poverty, divorced and remarried Catholics. There was lament at the slow and inadequate response of the Catholic Church to the horrors of the sexual abuse scandal, the Church's resistance to take responsibility and its reluctance to accompany the abused, their families and the whistle-blowers who drew attention to it. The faith of many Catholics was destroyed by the scandal exposed by the Royal Commission. Despite the loss of credibility of the Church in these times, there are individuals and church agencies, who by their works, remind us that the Church can be the bearer of good news.

Several groups and individuals spoke about the plight of divorced and civilly remarried Catholics in the Eucharistic community and asked for them to be permitted access to the Eucharist. This matter was raised in an intervention in the XI Ordinary General Assembly of Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist in Rome in 2005, and while in recent years, Pope Francis has attempted to simplify and speed up the marriage tribunal process for annulments, this does not assist the vast majority (around 90%) of those couples who choose not to enter the annulment process. Our church is impoverished when dedicated Catholics, who happen to be divorced and remarried civilly, cannot fully participate as members of the Church. The hunger of these Catholics for the Eucharist should be acknowledged and serious attempts be made to find ways to welcome them to the Eucharistic table.

"If we demonstrate that we ARE the church supporting and reaching out to those who are on the margins, then they may become trusting and confident that they will be listened to and treated with respect and dignity."

THE ORDAINED

The ministry of the ordained is appreciated and vital for the preaching of the Gospel and the mission of the Church. Respondents were grateful for priestly ministry, for Mass, the sacraments and prayer. The topic of ordination was mentioned several times. Some stated that ordaining male married deacons while barring women from the same ministry denies the church the richness of women's wisdom and spirituality. There were also several calls for the church to seriously consider optional celibacy for the priesthood, and the acknowledgement that we have lost many good men who have left the priesthood to be married. Some see this option as partially addressing the crisis in the Church in which parishes are clustered and many of the dwindling number of clergy being given responsibility for more than one parish. Some of our rural and remote communities do not have weekly access to a priest or the celebration of the Eucharist. In these places, it is left up to the community to gather for prayer.

There is a proposal that seminarians live and work in parishes throughout their studies and not just for short periods of time towards the end of their training and formation. Our Church in Australia urgently needs to raise up Australian-born pastors as those vocations are dwindling rapidly. Most dioceses now rely on overseas clergy to fill the gaps, many of them being temporary appointments in Australia. The issue of enculturation is a huge one for our overseas clergy and it is as much a struggle for many of them as it is for the communities they serve.

Clericalism continues to weaken participation in the Church. The relationship between the clergy and laity is in need of change so that both can undertake their rightful places in the efficient and shared functioning of the Church. Clericalism does imply that the Parish Priest does not have authority in the parish but, rather describes a distorted attitude toward clergy, an excessive deference and an assumption of their moral superiority. In the concise description of Pope Francis, it's when "Clerics feel they are superior, [and when] they are far from the people." The scourge of clericalism is reduced when we walk synodally, listen respectfully, share with humility and discern communally when decisions are to be made.

Sometimes the ideas of the faith community are blocked by the clergy who think that they are the only ones who can take the initiative and make decisions. Shared decision making should be modelled by the Pastoral Council.

[3] Second Vatican Council, *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, #1.

www.vatican.va

[4] *Ibid.*, #3.

There was also some discussion on the ability of lay people, to preside at Baptisms, Marriages and Funerals. This possibility arises not only from consideration of the ongoing shortage of available clergy but also from the viewpoint of shared pastoral ministry between lay and ordained. Some Dioceses in Australia and New Zealand have appointed trained and competent Lay Pastoral Leaders of parishes and smaller faith communities. This way of being in community is not a new phenomenon and although this model may come with particular concerns and struggles, it seems to be a life-giving model of ministry which can be embraced together with the various other forms of parish pastoral leadership.

LAY PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

There was also some discussion on the ability of lay people, to preside at Baptisms, Marriages and Funerals. This possibility arises not only from consideration of the ongoing shortage of available clergy but also from the viewpoint of shared pastoral ministry between lay and ordained. Some Dioceses in Australia and New Zealand have appointed trained and competent Lay Pastoral Leaders of parishes and smaller faith communities. This way of being in community is not a new phenomenon and although this model may come with particular concerns and struggles, it seems to be a life-giving model of ministry which can be embraced together with the various other forms of parish pastoral leadership.



The Synod and the Plenary Council consultations provided people with the opportunity to express their deepest desires and heartfelt yearnings. There was much attentive listening to the voices of others, in the sharing of one's own faith experiences and expressing particular concerns and challenges. Continuing to walk the synodal path requires courage and commitment from all the members of the Church, trusting in the constant presence of the Holy Spirit to guide us especially in the times when the way is not clear.

It is important to acknowledge the wisdom of groups: their communal discernment shows us that the Holy Spirit speaks to us in speaks through different people in various ways. When discernment arises out of prayer, exciting and wonderful things are possible.

Discernment and group sharing also presents us with diverse points of view, many which may seem opposed to ours. We reflect on that which has been said, ponder on the things that resonate with us and to consider, with humility, how we might work together for the good of all. Various proposals made during the consultation process are worthy of further consideration, including a greater role in shared decision-making at every level of the Church.

Walking the synodal path is a process that needs constant prayer and practice. It is not intended to be a once-off experience in preparation for the Synod of Bishops in 2023. Our best example of accompanying each other in integrity and truth come from Jesus himself, beautifully demonstrated in the Emmaus story. Being synodal is the only authentic way forward for the Church to be missional and evangelising. In our Diocese, we have committed to walking the synodal path with the firm conviction we must accompanying one another as Jesus did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

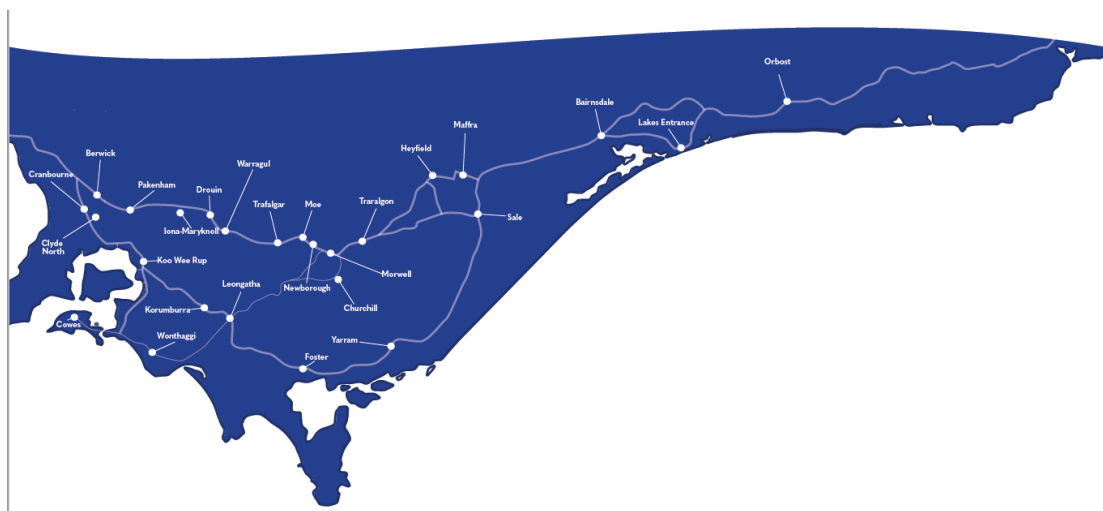
Pope Francis insists that synodality describes the shape of the Church that emerges from the Gospel of Jesus, which is called to become incarnate today in history, in creative fidelity to Tradition. Consequently, "making a synodal Church a reality is an indispensable precondition for a new missionary energy that will involve the entire People of God." [5]



[5] International Theological Commission. Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church, 2 March 2018, #9 www.vatican.va

APPENDICES

THE DIOCESE OF SALE IN THE PROVINCE OF MELBOURNE



The parishes of the Diocese of Sale

Diocesan Website <https://www.cdsale.org.au/>

Synod Resources developed by the Diocese of Sale

- Diocesan Website for the Synod <https://www.cdsale.org.au/synod-of-bishops>
- Diocese of Sale Coffee Conversations <https://tinyurl.com/Synod-Coffee-Conversations>
- Week by week Sunday Mass resources for the Synod <https://tinyurl.com/Sale-Diocese-Synod-Mass-Kits>

Sale Diocesan Assembly 2019

- Sharing our Story, Celebrating Our Faith, Shaping our Future. Ideas for Pastoral Initiatives
<https://tinyurl.com/Sale-Diocese-Assembly-2019>

Diocesan Social Profile 2016

- based on the 2016 Australian Census) <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/2016-diocesan-social-profiles/>



Coffee Conversations

Preparing for the Synod - Let's walk together.



Catholic Diocese of Sale

Prayer for the Synod: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.

All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever.
Amen.

Welcome and thank you for participating.

We want to hear from you!

To start your conversation, choose one or more topics 1-10, then contemplate the questions.

THE BIG QUESTIONS

HOW DO CATHOLICS 'JOURNEY TOGETHER'?

HOW MIGHT WE DO IT BETTER?

COMMUNION

1. COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

Jesus wants us to walk together, side by side.

- How do you feel we as Catholics are doing at walking side-by-side?
- Who do you feel is included / welcome on the church's local journey?
- Who is not included or welcomed?

2. OUR LISTENING

Listening is the first step - it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice.

- How good are we Catholics at listening?
- Who do we need to listen to more? (Consider – women, young people, lay people, those on the margins of society, minority groups, the socially discarded and excluded.)
- What stops us from listening more carefully?

3. OUR SPEAKING OUT

Everyone is invited to speak boldly and courageously in freedom, truth, and love.

- How good are we as Catholics at speaking out in public?
- How do we say what is important to us as Catholics?
- What helps or hinders our public visibility?

4. OUR CELEBRATION

For Catholics, 'togetherness' is based on gathering as a community to explore the Gospels (Word) and to break bread (Eucharist).

- Are our Catholic gatherings achieving their purpose for our people?
- How does our gathering for prayer (including Mass) meet people's needs?
- How do they fail to meet people's needs?

PARTICIPATION

5. SHARING AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Our Church is all about participation and shared responsibility.

- Catholics aim to balance authority and governance with teamwork and co-responsibility. How well do we achieve this?
- How could we balance these better?
- How do we encourage lay involvement, participation and leadership?

6. OUR DISCERNMENT AND DECISION-MAKING

Our aim is to make decisions by discerning what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community.

- How well do you feel we do this?
- What methods or processes do Catholic communities use to include people in discernment and decision-making?
- What do you think we should do to improve our efforts in this?

7. BEING FORMED TO JOURNEY TOGETHER

All of us need to be open to change and ongoing learning and formation.

- To what extent do you find Catholics are open to change and new learning?
- How do we as a Catholic community form our people to listen, participate and be open to change?
- Have you found Church leaders to be willing to listen, participate and remain open to new ways?

MISSION

8. OUR COMMON MISSION

Walking together enables us all to accept our mission to share the Good News.

- Do we as Catholics take this mission seriously?
- How exactly do we as Church members spread the Good News of Jesus Christ?
- What stops us from being active in mission?

9. OUR CONVERSATIONS

Genuine conversation requires perseverance and patience but leads to understanding.

- As Catholics, how good are we at conversation – both listening and sharing?
- Good conversation (dialogue) leads to collaboration – how, and how well, do we collaborate as Catholics in our local community?
- In what ways could we dialogue and collaborate better with others in society (e.g. in politics, economics, culture, civil society, and those who are poor or disadvantaged?)

10. WALKING WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS/ECUMENISM

Walking with other Christians is essential to our mission to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

- How well do we as Catholics know our sisters and brothers in other churches?
- What do we share and how do we journey with Christians from other churches (denominations)?
- Why don't we do more together?

RESPOND

Listen to each other carefully and prepare a response of up to 250 words for each topic 1-4. The submission can consider points like:

- Is there a common thread in what was shared? Is there something missing that you had expected would be said?
- Have you received any particular insight or revelation? What is it?
- Where did you experience a sense of harmony with others as you shared with one another?
- What are the feelings of the group? Is there consensus or disagreement?
- What is the way forward?

SUBMIT YOUR RESPONSE

Online by 27 FEBRUARY 2022 using the **SUBMIT YOUR RESPONSE HERE** button at <https://tinyurl.com/HavingASay> or use the QR code



While online responses are preferred, you may wish to contact the Diocesan Pastoral Office to submit your response by 18 FEBRUARY 2022



E mail: pastoral@sale.catholic.org.au
(Word format)



Post: Diocesan Pastoral Office,
Catholic Diocese of Sale,
PO Box 1410 Warragul Vic 3820

Thankyou

MORE INFORMATION

Diocesan Pastoral Office: P (03) 5622 5677

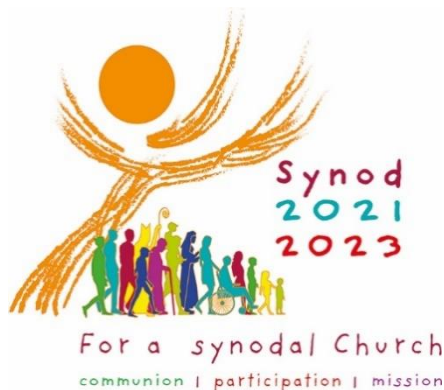
Catholic Diocese of Sale: www.cdsale.org.au/

Call: Your local parish

ACBC: www.catholic.org.au/synodalchurch



*Material adapted from the Archdiocese of Wellington
Synod Resource. Used with permission*



SYNOD JOURNEY 2021-2023

February 2022



Let's Walk Together!

During February 2022 we will be focussing on the **third** of the Synod Themes:
Mission

Further Synod resources can be accessed via our Diocesan website at

<https://www.cdsale.org.au/synod-of-bishops>

This Mass resource has been prepared for your use for the Sundays of Ordinary Time in February:

- Bulletin notice
- Reflection on Scripture
- Prayers of Intercession
- Quote of the Day (Pope Francis on Synodality)
- PowerPoint Slides for each Sunday in January (separate file) using a weekly question from the **Mission** section of the Synod Questions – a good time to display these is in the time after Communion, inviting some quiet reflection.
- The Ordinary Time and Synod themes have been woven together in this Mass kit so that the selected Scripture quote of the day and the message of the Synod (**Mission**) may be transmitted to your assemblies during the liturgy and at community gatherings.

To underline **Mission, key messages to transmit include:**

- Synodality is the call of God for the Church in the Third Millennium.
- The synodal path is one that is guided by the Gospel and grounded in Tradition and requires that all the People of God engage in mission in the various pathways of life.
- Together, as the People of God we participate in the **mission** of the Church to together, listen and discern the work of the Spirit within the world.
- We enter into **mission** through our daily living, being attentive to recognising the face of Christ in all those we encounter in our home, work and community.
- Focusing on **communion**, **participation** and **mission**, Pope Francis desires this Synod to be an experience of *encounter*, *listening* and *discernment*. He reminds us that in Jesus' own encounters, he walks with people and listens to the questions and concerns deep in their hearts. Jesus shows us that God is not found in neat and orderly places, distant from reality, but walks ever at our side on the rocky roads and in the dark places of life.
- Being immersed in the **mission** of Jesus is not a temporary phase in preparation for this next Synod in 2023, but is meant to animate and enrgise our lives as Catholic Christians. What are we really on about as baptised members of Christ's body, if not to be on mission and spreading his good news?



SYNOD OF BISHOPS 2021-2023
DIOCESAN CONSULTATION PERIOD
(December 2021-February 2022)
MASS KIT FOR FEBRUARY 2022

6th February – 5th Sunday Ordinary Time (C)



Word of God Sunday

Synod Theme: Mission

This week's focus: Our common mission

Word of God Sunday Bulletin Notice

The Church in Australia celebrates the Sunday of the Word of God on the first Sunday in February – February 6 in 2022. Pope Francis established the day, which is devoted to “the celebration, study and dissemination” of the Word of God. Visit www.catholic.org.au/wordofgodsunday to access resources to help commemorate the day and for suggestions on how to better engage with Sacred Scripture in various ways and settings.

Bulletin Insert - Synod 2023



Synod 2023: Our Common Mission: Walking together enables us all to accept our mission to share the Good News. Do we take this mission seriously? What stops us from being active in mission?

Have your say by **February 27, 2022**

<https://tinyurl.com/HavingASay> or scan this QR code



Penitential Rite ¹

Presider The Lord Jesus, who invites us to the table of the Word and of the Eucharist, calls us to conversion; let us acknowledge that we are sinners and confidently invoke God's mercy.

Lord Jesus, you are the Word of God made flesh. Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you restored sight to the blind by the power of your word,
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

¹ Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation. *Liturgical and Pastoral Resources for Word of God Sunday 2022.* <http://www.pcpne.va/content/pcpne/en/attivita/parola/2022.html>

Lord Jesus, you free our lives from sin. Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us
to everlasting life.
Amen.

Reflection on Scripture ²

Peter said: “Leave me Lord; I am a sinner.”

Jesus replied: “Do not be afraid;”

Lk 5: 8, 10

One significant, common element in each of the three Scripture readings today is that all three central characters – the prophet Isaiah, St Paul the Apostle and the first disciple of Jesus, Peter – acknowledge their sinfulness and unworthiness before the Lord. At the same time, all three discern a call to something greater.

In this way, these biblical heavyweights prefigure the situation we find ourselves in today some 2000 years later: we are graced sinners, hearers of God’s Word and called to a deeper mission.

It has been noted that one of the characteristics of the earliest disciples of Jesus is that they responded to a personal call from the Lord, in the same way that the prophets did in the Old Testament – the Hebrew Scriptures. In light of their experience, some questions might be proposed for those of us who seek to follow in their footsteps:

Our call to mission

- What call from the Lord have I discerned in the past week or today? How did I or how will I respond?
- What concrete tasks is God asking of me, my family, my colleagues and friends, my parish community in relation to the Church and society at the present time? This call will be different for each person or community depending upon the gifts received from the Lord.
- What message does the abundant catch of fish and the call of the disciples in today’s Gospel reading teach us about the loving providence of God?
- If we are members of Christ’s Body through Baptism, and affirm this union through our participation in the Eucharist, what are the implications for our missionary discipleship?

Some members of the congregation may think that it is not always obvious that God delivers abundantly when we follow his words. In response, we could suggest that maybe the gifts that

² Homily Notes for Word of God Sunday <https://www.catholic.org.au/wordofgodSunday>

God gives us are not so much an abundance of fish, food or financial support, but a new, life-giving way of looking at familiar daily tasks associated with our respective jobs, roles and vocations.

What God gives us, when we allow ourselves to be open to his transforming presence, is a renewed way of looking at our life, talents and mission – a gift of renewed sight, faith, insight, forgiveness, purpose and mission to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is our way, our truth and our life.

During the Celebration of the Eucharist, after the Lamb of God at the Breaking of the Bread, we echo the words of the Centurion in Matthew's Gospel and say:

"Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."

Like the important biblical figures in today's readings, God calls us, "warts and all", to serve his purposes which are not always the same as our own.

Our readings today invite to look honestly at our lives, to acknowledge that we are sinners – albeit graced sinners – and are called by God to follow the Lord and his life-giving word in missionary discipleship, and thereby to attract others to Christ.

We are called by the Lord, on this Sunday of the Word of God, to be faithful members of his Body and willing witnesses to his Word in our world today.

Prayers of the Faithful ³

Presider Dear sisters and brothers, having heard God's life-giving Word on this Day of the Lord, let us be open now to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as we pray for the needs of the Church, the world and our local community.

Reader

For all servants of God's Word in the Church, particularly Pope Francis, and all members of the clerical, religious and lay apostolates: that they will always promote the proclamation of the Gospel and the practice of Christian virtue in their ministries. We pray to the Lord.

For all leaders in government and the legal profession, especially those who solemnly swear on God's Word to speak the truth from their heart: that their words and example will inspire others towards honesty and integrity of life. We pray to the Lord.

For all who research, teach and publish God's Word in our world: that their study, formation and resources will be fruitful in helping more people to know, love and serve the Lord. We pray to the Lord.

For all proclaim and preach the Word of God in our communities: that they will always treasure the opportunity to be formed by God's Word and to use their gifts to bring this

³ *Prayers of Intercession, Word of God Sunday* (adapted) <https://www.catholic.org.au/wordofgodsunday>

Word to life in the liturgy and in the lives of those close to them. We pray to the Lord.

For ourselves: that we may participate in being a more synodal church, responding with generosity to Jesus' call to mission, sharing of ourselves as we accompany others in our daily living. We pray to the Lord.

For all who suffer in mind, body or spirit: that they will never lose hope in God but place their trust in him, and find comfort, consolation and healing in the words of his Son. We pray to the Lord.

For all who have died recently or whose anniversaries of death occur around this time, especially N. _____: that they will rest in the peace of Christ and rise in glory on the last day. We pray to the Lord.

Presider Gracious and loving God, source of all wisdom and love, we ask you to hear the prayers we make this day in response to your life-giving Word. We make these prayers through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.

Quote of the Day on Synodality ⁴

"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."

Evangelii Gaudium, 'The Joy of the Gospel' (#49).

We are missionary disciples (*Evangelii Gaudium* 119-121; 48-49)

To encounter Jesus is to be sent forth to proclaim him joyfully: "We have found the Messiah!" (Jn 1:41). This is evangelisation: sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in my life.

Pope Francis makes the point that evangelisation is not to be left to the "professionals" while the rest of us are passive recipients. Through baptism every Christian is challenged to be actively engaged in evangelisation, and there is a certain urgency about this calling. (EG 120)

Indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. (EG 120)

Think of St Paul. After his encounter with Jesus he "immediately proclaimed Jesus" (Acts 9:20).

"So, what are we waiting for?" asks Pope Francis (EG 120).

⁴ Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel*. www.vatican.va. Teresa Pirola and the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, *The Joy Of The Gospel: Seven Challenges From Pope Francis*, 2013.

Prayer ⁵

Pilgrim God,
you walk alongside us
and speak to us throughout the Scriptures:
 in the message of the prophets,
 the songs of David
 and the vision of Paul.
Your Son, Jesus Christ,
listens to our hopes and fears
and shows us how to live:
 in our love of neighbour
 our desire for justice,
 and in our dying and rising each day.
Send us the Holy Spirit to open
our hearts and minds
so that we may be your witnesses
throughout the world:
 in our protection of the vulnerable,
 our words and actions
 and in our communion with the earth.
Amen

Pray at Home

Daily Prayer (Madonna Magazine/Australian Jesuits)

Daily readings and Scripture reflections. Free subscription. <https://www.pray.com.au/>

Connect@home (Diocese of Bathurst)

A range of resources to assist parishioners with worship and prayer at home, including links prayer and Mass for You At Home . Daily emails include a link to the Scripture readings of the day, together with a short reflection and prayer. You could do this sacred reading on your own, or with members of your household. Subscription is free. Follow the links at [Connect@home](https://www.bathurst.catholic.org.au/) or visit <https://www.bathurst.catholic.org.au/>

Pray at Home (Australian Catholic Bishops)

A comprehensive listing of Prayer resources and Mass offerings from Dioceses around Australia. <https://www.catholic.org.au/prayathome>

⁵ Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation. *Liturgical and Pastoral Resources for Word of God Sunday 2022*. <http://www.pcpne.va/content/pcpne/en/attivita/parola/2022.html>

Walk together as a Church with the Holy Spirit

The purpose of the Synod is
"to plant dreams", to "journey together"
following the course of the Church in
the third millennium with a truly
synodal mentality.

Join us!



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For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission