

# Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide

## Our Experiences with Synodality Diocesan Testimony for the Synod on Synodality

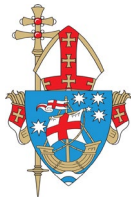
The characteristics and practices of synodality have been a key feature of the Archdiocese of Adelaide since the Second Vatican Council which have included Diocesan and Parish Pastoral Councils, Diocesan Leadership Teams made up of clergy and lay women and men, diocesan assemblies, various advisory councils and commissions, investment in lay pastoral ministry, formation for pastoral leadership, listening structures and pastoral initiatives in parishes, schools and communities. Over the past 60 years there have been periods of strong synodal practice and periods where it was lagging.

The recent consultations and listening and discernment process that have fed into the Synod on Young People, the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Plenary Council, the Synod on Synodality and our own Diocesan Assemblies have reignited the desire for a co-responsible and collaborative church that truly listens and engages all of the People of God and those of good will in participation in the life, faith and mission of the Church. For many in the Archdiocese, the listening and consultation processes are a reminder of the changes initiated by Vatican II, and for others it was the first time they felt they were listened to by the institutional Church. There has also been scepticism at the effectiveness of the synodal processes and ability for the Church respond to current and future challenges adequately and quickly. Others have been wary of the possibility of change and potential loss of identity. In this way, the Archdiocese of Adelaide reflects the experiences of the global Church. In 2020, upon his appointment to the Archdiocese of Adelaide, Archbishop Patrick O'Regan called for a Diocesan Assembly to reengage the people with the preparations for the Plenary Council (which had been delayed by COVID-19), and to begin to discern the realities and needs of the Archdiocese. The convergence of the Plenary Council, our Diocesan Assemblies and the Global Synod have inspired many synodal initiatives.

**Assemblies and Gatherings** (see [www.adelaidediocesanassembly.org.au](http://www.adelaidediocesanassembly.org.au) for more information)

Assemblies have once again become a regular feature in the diocese and a useful means for listening, dialogue and community building. Participants typically include representatives from parishes, schools, communities and agencies. Each assembly features opportunities for prayer, discernment and formation. The focus and outcomes of each assembly differs from year to year. In addition to the Diocesan Assemblies, we have supported regional and parish assemblies as well as listening and feedback forums for Synod and particular local concerns.

- **2021 Diocesan Assembly.** The 2021 Assembly reengaged the Archdiocese with the practice of 'assembling'. Prior to the Assembly, a period of diocesan-wide consultation took place which guided the development of six pastoral themes for discernment at the Assembly: Leadership and Leadership Formation; Inclusion and Healing; Faith Formation and Spiritual Development; Parish Life and Liturgy; Outreach and Accompaniment of Children, Families and Young People; A Church that Hears and Responds to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor. 450 participants gathered over 3 days and engaged in *conversations in the Spirit* in small groups resulting in 255 recommendations for local, national and universal consideration. These recommendations continue to guide our pastoral activity.
- **2022 Diocesan Assembly.** Between the 2021 and 2022 Diocesan Assemblies, parishes, schools, communities and Catholic agencies were invited to discern the recommendations from the 2021 Assembly and provide feedback for their own context and for Archdiocesan consideration. At the 2022 Diocesan Assembly, participants gathered in workshops shaped around the six pastoral themes from the



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previous Assembly. There were 3 rounds of workshops which provided formation, examples of good practice, and strategic planning.

- **2023 Regional Assemblies.** To further develop the discernment and planning around recommendations from the 2021 Assembly, parishes, schools and communities were invited to gather in one of 9 regional assemblies. A planning group was developed in each region, supported by the Archdiocese, whose task it was to develop the agenda for the assembly. Each region provided opportunities for listening and discernment and initial planning for collaboration and mutual support. Many of the regions have decided to make the assemblies a regular fixture and are committed to exploring synodality and mission together.
- **2024 Diocesan Assembly.** An Assembly is planned for June 2024 which will further embed the practice of shared listening and discernment through conversation in the spirit. The Assembly will focus on implementing the decrees of the Plenary Council and 2021 Diocesan Assembly recommendations.

### Diocesan Pastoral Council

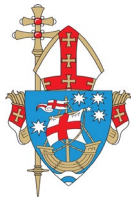
The re-establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) was a direct result of the 2021 Diocesan Assembly. Initially an 'interim council' was set up to develop the terms of reference, discern strategic priorities from the assembly recommendations, and develop new Archdiocesan Vision and Mission statements. The DPC was formalised in 2023 with membership reflecting the diversity of the Archdiocese and includes women and men, clergy and laity whose gifts and experience provide wisdom and creativity to the discernment of pastoral realities in the Archdiocese. The DPC adopted *conversations in the Spirit* as its method for discernment. The DPC is strongly committed to the practice and promotion of synodality throughout the Archdiocese.

Key Projects of the DPC:

- ***Archdiocesan Vision and Mission Statements.***
- ***Development of a Framework for Leadership in a Synodal Church.*** The call for leadership development for women and men serving in various roles in the Church was identified as an essential need out of the 2021 Assembly. This framework provides a basic outline of what is required for leadership in a synodal Church.
- ***Communications Strategy.*** The 2021 Assembly recommendations included requests for greater transparency and accountability through clear communication strategies. The DPC provides a public recounting of meetings in the diocesan newspaper and communicates regularly with the Bishop's Council of Priests and other advisory bodies. DPC members visit parish pastoral councils and diocesan events to listen to the voices of people from across the Archdiocese.
- ***Formation in Faith for Mission (see Formation below)***

### Ministries and Roles – Pastoral Services Team

The 2021 Assembly recommendations informed the realignment of diocesan pastoral ministries and offices into one Pastoral Services Team (PST) resulting in a more collaborative and cohesive approach to ministry. The new structure of the PST reflects the six pastoral themes of the Assembly. Leadership roles were redesigned to support a synodal approach to mission and ministry (Director and Assistant Director of Pastoral Life and Mission), and Pastoral Leader and Pastoral Support roles are responsible for developing strategies and resources



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that support responses to the 2021 Diocesan Assembly Recommendations and participation, communion and mission.

### Formation

An overarching theme of the consultations for the Plenary Council, Global Synod and our Diocesan Assemblies is the call to address formation at every level, age and stage of life and ministry.

- ***Drawn into the Joy of the Gospel: Formation in the Archdiocese of Adelaide / Commission for Formation***

Following the 2021 Diocesan Assembly, a working group was formed to further discern formation needs of the Archdiocese. Out of this group, the Diocesan statement on formation, *Drawn into the Joy of the Gospel*, was developed. It reflects Pope Francis' vision for the Church in *Evangelii Gaudium* and the call for a synodal approach to formation for those in pastoral ministry and the formation of faith for all people. Additionally, the Archdiocesan Commission for Formation was established to develop strategies and support for formation in the Archdiocese.

### Synodality in Parishes

It is at the most local level of church where synodality is either expressed in its fullness or meets resistance. In parishes where there is a support for lay and clergy collaboration in ministry and decision-making, it works well. Where there has been little to no experience of co-responsibility and shared leadership, synodality struggles. We have observed that when those in leadership support and promote synodality there is greater uptake and trust from others in the community. The Archdiocese is committed to providing formation and support for synodality in all areas of Church life, especially in the parish.

- **Support and resourcing for Parish Pastoral Councils**

Gatherings of Parish Priests and Chairpersons of Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish were established to encourage the promotion of synodal structures and practices. These gatherings take place twice yearly and provide opportunities for listening and dialogue, formation and information sharing. A Parish Pastoral Council Handbook was created, and regular formation and support is available from the Archdiocese.

- **Being Church Together – Parish-School Relationship**

The relationship between Catholic schools and their parishes has been both a positive contribution to the development of Catholic community and a source of tension from the very early days of the Archdiocese. *Being Church Together* is the result of listening and dialogue between schools and parishes over several years. This resource provides a theology, vision and guidance for dialogue, discernment and action. *Being Church Together* has is assisting parishes and schools to enhance the synodal relationship and shared mission.

Publications mentioned in this testimony are available online at: <https://adelaide.catholic.org.au/our-works-and-community/pastoral-services/publications>