



ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE

Diocesan Summary: Synod for Bishops

While engaging in the consultation process for the Synod of Bishops, the Brisbane Archdiocese is concurrently preparing for our diocesan synod linked to the Australian Fifth Plenary Council 2021. “SYNOD24: I am making all things new” will discern a series of practical, measurable, and Spirit-led action plans that will help the archdiocese to implement the decrees of Plenary Council.

For the Synod for Bishops, we therefore chose to focus on three topics from the **First Session Synthesis Report** that are hot-button issues for our archdiocese that require rigorous exploration and strategic and intentional consultation. These topics are: ***A Church “out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation”***; ***Women in the Life and Mission of the Church***; and ***Mission in the Digital Environment***. These topics speak into the richly diverse community that make up the People of God within our archdiocese whose unique giftedness of feminine particularity, culture, faith, joy, tradition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, and story has yet to be fully offered and whole-heartedly received in the true sense of co-responsibility. While at the same time, breaking open these topics through consultation is helping explore the complexities of how to be a relevant and evangelising co-responsible church on mission within a pluralistic and secularised society. It’s helping us explore how our archdiocese can better reach those that are on the margins of our community that do not feel a sense of belonging or welcome within the church, those who feel disenfranchised ignored, hurt, silenced, misunderstood and those that have been abused and disregarded.

The submissions we received were mostly from face-to-face gatherings that explored the question ***“How can we be a more co-responsible church on mission?”***. These gatherings were called “consultations”, as their aim was to allow the Holy Spirit to speak in and through each participant, paying attention to common themes and directions that emerged that could lead to practical and measurable actions. The main elements of the sessions generally included spiritual conversations and a SEE. JUDGE. ACT. inspired process aimed at identifying what is happening within the archdiocese that should be affirmed, what knowledge and learnings from flourishing communities could be harnessed and shared, and where the gaps and needs are.

The Brisbane Archdiocese is complex in its diversity. It covers an area of 77,000 square kilometres with 94 parishes spread across the southeast corner of Queensland. While there was a 34% decline in Mass attendance directly after the COVID19 pandemic, the archdiocese is now experiencing a period of growth, with a 19.19% increase in Mass attendance over the course of 2023. The archdiocese is home to well over 20 active multicultural communities, recently launched an ambitious and highly praised Laudato Si’ Action Plan and has made significant inroads on implementing the second iteration of the Archdiocesan Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan. These markers of a diverse and inclusive archdiocese speak to its commitment to being a co-responsible church on mission while being cognisant of the need to move together in a synodal way, so that all members of the church feel seen, heard, valued, and loved.

With this context in mind, the consultation sessions were intentionally designed to represent as diverse a range of perspectives and lived experiences across the archdiocese as possible. This included a mix of age, cultural background, academic and theological perspectives, those in leadership positions, and practitioners on the grassroots level, those actively involved in the church,

those disenfranchised by the church and/or disconnected from church communities (where possible), women and men, laity, religious and clergy. This intentionality towards inclusivity and diversity meant that, at times, differentiation was required and deviations from the full consultation process were implemented where appropriate. For example, consultation sessions with First Nations Elders and community members focused on listening to the experiences and ideas of the community, providing a safe space for Truth-telling and the sharing of hopes, ideas, and frustrations.

Breakdown of consultation sessions for each theme:

A Church “out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation”

- 2 large sessions (approximately 20 and 40 participants respectively) with multicultural community chaplains and leaders.
- 3 average sized sessions with First Nations Elders and community members from across the archdiocese including Cherbourg, Inala and Stradbroke Island.
- 2 large sessions with parishioners engaging in a Reconciliation Action Plan Networking Day. *Please note these sessions were considered “informal consultations” as the discussions from the activities were taken into consideration as broad context.*

Women in the Life and Mission of the Church

- 1 large session (over 30 participants) with a significantly diverse cross-section of the archdiocese.
- Submission of: “Women’s Think-Tank 2022 Proposal August 29, 2022”.
- Submission of a paper on “Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men”.

Mission In the Digital Environment

- 1 small session with young Catholic podcast content creators.
- 1 average sized session with Comms and Marketing experts from Archdiocesan agencies and parishes.
- 1 average sized session with Archdiocesan digital media content creators.
- 1 large session with young people aged 18 – 35 highly engaged in the church.

In all sessions, key themes and nuanced areas of consideration clearly and definitively emerged, speaking into what it means to be a more co-responsible church on mission within the Brisbane Archdiocese.

Main Points of our Diocesan Summary:

1: It was noted that there is a high level of complexity associated with moving together in a synodal way, within such a richly diverse and inclusive Archdiocese. A need has been expressed to move together synodally within this context by being open to, and aware of the creativity of the Holy Spirit while also being cognisant of the challenge this poses to many.

2: A need has been identified for more common formation of cultural leaders, cultural community chaplains, cultural community members and members within the broader church community of underlying theology, ecclesiology, and missiology of inter-culturality.

3: A need has been identified for the broader church community to be more proactive in becoming informed around the significance of Reconciliation Action Plans in general, and to be more literate around the Archdiocese of Brisbane Reconciliation Action Plan specifically.

4: A need has been identified for formal, strategic, and intentional thinking around how ministries such as lector, acolyte and catechist can be expanded for more significant leadership opportunities and participation of women in the life and mission of the church.

5: A need has been identified for formal, strategic, and intentional thinking around how the archdiocese can proactively prepare for the female diaconate if this were to be approved by the Holy See, including diaconate formation programs becoming accessible to women.

6: A need has been identified for formal, strategic, and intentional thinking around how best to form Catholic digital media content creators to engage effectively in the mission of the church within the digital environment.

7: A need has been identified for formal, strategic, and intentional thinking around how best to articulate Catholic tradition, teaching, thought within the digital environment, staying faithful to the tradition, while also being cognisant of the context of an often anonymous, secular, and vulnerable digital audience.

Summary of Responses:

A Church “out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation”

Below are two key themes that came out of the consultations with multicultural communities and First Nations people:

A need has been identified for more common formation of cultural leaders, cultural community chaplains, cultural community members and members within the broader church community of underlying theology, ecclesiology, and missiology of inter-culturality. Some questions around this that have been raised and require further exploration include:

- What are the unique benefits and challenges to leading a community in a synodal way within the context of a particular culture?
- What formation opportunities are accessible to lay women and men within cultural communities to help empower and upskill laity to effectively lead?
- In what ways does ingrained clericalism (both from the perspective of clerics and laity) hinder or encourage the voices of women within the community to be heard and included in decision making?
- Taking a look at theology, ecclesiology and missiology through the lens of inter-culturality, what common language and understanding be used as a foundation for inter-cultural dialogue?

A need has been identified for the broader church community to be more proactive in becoming informed around the significance of Reconciliation Action Plans in general and to be more literate around the Archdiocese of Brisbane Reconciliation Action Plan specifically. Some questions around this that have been raised and areas that require further exploration include:

- Parishioners who are taking active roles in addressing the parish specific deliverables in the Archdiocesan RAP tend on average to be over the age of 50. The energy and advocacy within

this age demographic is to be commended, however consideration needs to be given to how parish communities can intentionally engage community members under the age of 50 in this important work towards reconciliation. Engaging in the parish implementation of the Archdiocesan RAP could happen during flexible hours (outside of weekend Mass times) that could attract community members with young families for example, that are often overcommitted and time-poor on weekends.

- What are the challenges that parishes are facing when actively trying to implement parish specific deliverables within the Archdiocesan RAP?
- How can Clergy and laity be encouraged to pro-actively engage in formation, Truth-telling, on-country experiences and cultural safety training to better understand the great gift of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their cultures, traditions, lived experiences, knowledges, and spiritualities?
- How might multi-cultural communities be formed around Reconciliation Action Plans in general, as well as the ways they can address the Archdiocesan Reconciliation Action Plan deliverables related to parish communities specifically.

Other responses that came through strongly in the sessions include:

- Multicultural communities feel now is the time to move towards one another through mutual invitations to celebrate Mass together (in their native languages), celebrating significant events together and exploring the use of translations to better engage those for whom English is not a first language.
- Now is the time to discern ways to bring young people together strategically and intentionally, so they can share their culture, faith, energy and joy. This expression of inter-culturality would add to the richness of the church as a whole and help embed within young people a deep sense of belonging within the broader archdiocesan community, not just to their cultural groups.
- A concern has been raised many times around the fact that young people in multicultural communities are leaving the Catholic church in favour of other denominations. Exploration around this is important, as it seems that the young people are still seeking connection to a church community and still feel a deep sense of faith but are not finding this within Catholic liturgies and communities.
- There is a recognised need to intentionally form laity, chaplains, and clergy within multicultural communities to be lead synodally. This includes in the areas of strategic planning, theology, leadership, and mission.
- Some Elders within the First Nations community expressed a perceived willingness within the archdiocese and in parishes to celebrate different cultures including the singing of hymns in different languages, cultural dance, wearing of cultural dress and so forth within Masses. Yet at the same time, they are perceiving a hesitancy within the archdiocese and in parishes to include elements of First Nations culture, ritual, and symbol. A need has been expressed to explore the celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Masses.

Women in the Life and Mission of the Church

Below are two key themes that came out of the consultations with a diverse cross-section of the archdiocese:

A need has been identified for formal, strategic, and intentional thinking around how ministries such as lector, acolyte and catechist can be expanded to include more significant leadership opportunities for, and the participation of, women in the life and mission of the church. Some questions around this that have been raised and areas that require further exploration include:

- How can places for women at decision-making tables within church structures (such as the Episcopal Council) be formalised as a matter of policy and as modus operandi?
- How can the church listen to the creativity of the Holy Spirit in the areas of theology, ecclesiology, and missiology to explore possible avenues for lay and religious led, (particularly female led), funerals and weddings?
- How might the church normalise the practice of lay led liturgies to help support the sustainability of parishes throughout the archdiocese?
- How might the church explore the practice of lay preaching more formally to draw on the giftedness, knowledge and experience of lay women and men?

A need has been identified for formal, strategic, and intentional thinking around how the archdiocese can proactively prepare for the female diaconate if this were to be approved by the Holy See including diaconate formation programs becoming accessible to women. Some questions around this that have been raised and areas that require further exploration include:

- How might the diaconate program in the Brisbane Archdiocese be made available to women and men equally?
- If access to the diaconate formation program became accessible to women, how might the archdiocese utilise the giftedness, knowledge, wisdom, and experience of women taking part in the program?
- How might the church better recognise and support the work of women within the community and in organisations through, for example, appropriate remuneration, employee benefits (such as maternity leave), culture-building and so forth?

Other responses that came through strongly in the sessions include:

- Discussion around the participation of women in the life and mission of the church has been taking place for far too long. The church has been moving too slowly on this issue and the lack of response and action has left many feeling frustrated, disenfranchised and “tired”.
- Clericalism presents as a significant challenge, either real or perceived, both from the perspective of Clergy and laity, in the participation of women in the life and mission of the church.
- A need has been identified for the intentional inter-generational and inter-cultural mentoring and accompaniment of women in areas of leadership, formation and ministry for proactive succession planning and to draw on the diverse experience, knowledge, wisdom and energy in all generations and stages of life.
- When exploring the theme “Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men” during the Second Assembly of the Australian Fifth Plenary Council, the process was interrupted by a large group of women and some men. A need has been identified to explore the nature of this disruption and what can be learned for our future discernment within our synodal process.

Mission In the Digital Environment

Below are two key themes that came out of the consultations with Catholic content creators, Comms and Marketing experts and young people highly engaged in the Catholic church:

A need has been identified for formal, strategic, and intentional thinking around how best to form Catholic digital media content creators to engage effectively in the mission of the church within the

digital environment. Some questions around this that have been raised and areas for further exploration include:

- Acknowledging that creating Catholic content for the digital environment can expose content creators and those engaging with the content to vicious online trolling, unhelpful and destructive criticism masked as “discussion” and misinformation. What are some effective formation tools around dialogue in the digital environment that can be used as a toolkit for Catholic content creators? What level of responsibility and oversight lies with the Catholic Church in monitoring this?
- What level of formation in Catechesis is required for content creators? How could this (or even should this) be monitored?
- How can the church think more inter-generationally around mission in the digital environment to harness the wisdom and experience of older members of the community and the native knowledge, energy, and creativity of younger generations?

A need has been identified for formal, strategic, and intentional thinking around how best to articulate Catholic teaching within the digital environment, staying faithful to the tradition, while also being cognisant of the context of an often anonymous, secular, and vulnerable digital audience.

- What responsibility lies with the content creator if/when members of their largely anonymous audience is significantly triggered and/or psychologically harmed by the content they created and/or shared?
- What formation can be/should be provided to Catholic content creators to ensure the content being created and shared is faithful to the tradition, contextual and life-giving? What level of oversight should the church have around this if any?

Other responses that came through strongly in the sessions include:

- We have a sacramental and physical faith. Some young people crave physicality but are reclusive and addicted to online spaces. Once we connect with young people online, how do we convey the beauty of the physical in person aspects of church to help young people find a balance between the digital world and the “real” world?
- Where is the Church’s study of the digital world, its challenges, opportunities, reach and potential? This is desperately needed to keep up with the times.
- How does the Holy Spirit move in the digital space? What theological thought has been developed around this to help understand what mission does/should/could look like and feels like in the digital environment?
- People are trying to make sense of their reality through the online world. Some may be turning to the digital environment to find meaning, love, and beauty instead of going outside. This is both an opportunity and a challenge as the search for meaning, love and beauty can draw people into discovering and engaging with Catholic content online, however it can hinder their ability and desire to encounter God and others in the real world too.

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