

THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE

SYNOD2024

Promulgation of the Action Plans

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:2)

The Synod of the Archdiocese of Brisbane took place at Holy Spirit Seminary, Banyo in two sessions in September and October 2024, each session beginning on Friday morning and finishing on Saturday afternoon.

A number of people were crucial to the preparation for the Synod. As chair of the Synod, Bishop Tim Norton SVD worked closely on the process with Stephanie Unger, the Executive Officer. In addition, much work was done by the Synod Engagement Team and by the writers who prepared the material for use at the Synod sessions, as well as serving when required at the sessions themselves.

The immediate background to the Synod was the Australian Plenary Council of 2021-22, the decisions and decrees of which provided a framework for the Synod. The material from the extensive consultation before the assemblies of the Plenary Council was taken into account by both the Synod Engagement Team and the writers. The question for the Synod was, How might the decisions and decrees of the Plenary Council be implemented in the Archdiocese of Brisbane? The Synod, then, was geared to action.

A larger context was the 2023-24 Synod on Synodality in Rome, the second session of which was held at the same time as the Archdiocesan Assembly. There was an interweaving of the two Synods, global and local, so that this final document of the Archdiocesan Synod needs to be read in conjunction with the final document of the global Synod. The two are complementary, both produced under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Both documents were the products of Synods which involved more than bishops. In the past, Synods had involved almost exclusively bishops, which is why they were called Synods of Bishops. Significantly, Pope Francis has changed the name of the Office in Rome by dropping "of Bishops", so that it now becomes just "the Office of the Synod". Along the same lines, we in Australia sought a dispensation from the canonical provisions to allow for more who were not ordained to take part in the Plenary Council. That dispensation was granted by the Holy See, if only in part.

A still larger context of the Synod was the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65. In the Council's documents the word "synodality" never appears; yet it is clear by now that synodality takes us to the heart of the Council's teaching about how we are to be a co-responsible Church for the sake of mission. Synodality, like the Council, is not just about the Church's internal workings, but about our mission to the world. So too are these action plans coming from the Archdiocesan Synod.

At the Synod in Rome, Pope Francis accepted the final document as the magisterial statement at the end of the Synod. This was instead of what had been the practice in the past, that the Pope produce an Apostolic Exhortation on the basis of the final document of a Synod. Similarly here I promulgate the decisions of the Archdiocesan Synod, not exactly as they were handed to me but substantially unchanged. What came to me from the Synod was less refined than the document that was presented to the Pope in Rome; so I have made some editorial rearrangements and added an introduction and conclusion.

Neither the Synod in Rome nor the Brisbane Synod was a final point of arrival. Both were important moments with a long pre-history and a future stretching far ahead. They could not say or do all that needs to be said and done. We are on a long journey, and the Synod is a decisive staging-post on the journey without being the final destination.

Like the Plenary Council, the Synod had three phases: preparation, celebration, implementation. The preparation phase involved listening to many voices in the consultation, especially in the parishes and deaneries; the celebration phase was the members of the Synod listening to each other in the two sessions; and now the implementation phase looks to the practical application of the Synod's action plans in the Archdiocese of Brisbane. That will take time. Some can be implemented quickly; others will require patience. But each of these three phases is under the influence of the Holy Spirit, since if that is not true all we are left with is politics; and the Church is much more than that.

Therefore, having listened attentively to the voices of the Archdiocesan Synod at the two sessions and in the exercise of my legislative power (can. 466), I now promulgate the action plans for the implementation of the decrees of the Plenary Council in the Archdiocese of Brisbane. These I sign as the synodal declarations and decrees (can. 466). I do so as the one charged with taking the final decisions, to the making of which many have contributed. In that sense, these are decisions not just of the Archbishop but of the Church.

All 50 action plans are important, but not all are of equal weight. Some are marked with three asterisks (21), indicating that they have priority or are more pressing, others with two asterisks (20), indicating that they have not quite the same priority or are less pressing, and some with one asterisk (9), indicating that the others have precedence over them. The judgements made are mine, though I realise that the imminent change of leadership in the Archdiocese and changes in society through the next few years may influence the process of implementation.

Plenary Council Decree 1: Healing Wounds, Receiving Gifts

The focus here is on the need for a new engagement of the Church with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, beginning with a new kind of listening in the belief that we all can and must learn from the first inhabitants of the land.

Archdiocesan Synod Action Plans

***That, building on the Archdiocesan Reconciliation Action Plan, the Archdiocese develop and implement **an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander truth-telling, professional learning and formation plan** that provides opportunities for all those within parishes, communities and agencies to come to a deeper recognition,

appreciation and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures and spiritualities.

****That the Archdiocese develop and distribute culturally appropriate resources to assist parishes, communities and agencies to include aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, traditions, spiritualities, ritual and symbol in prayers and liturgies.**

****That the Archdiocese develop culturally specific learning and formation opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.**

Plenary Council Decree 2: Choosing Repentance, Seeking Healing

The focus here is on addressing sexual abuse in the Church, making amends for failures in the past and working to ensure that the Church is a safe place for all, but especially for the young and the vulnerable.

Archdiocesan Synod Action Plans

*****That in dialogue with survivors, the consequences of physical, sexual and spiritual abuse by Church personnel be addressed within the Archdiocese through truth-telling and story-telling sessions in safe spaces that may give survivors and their family members a voice to be heard and honoured, and support for research and programs related to trauma-informed spiritual care and the long-term impact of spiritual harm.**

****That a Sunday of the liturgical year be set aside within the Archdiocese to focus upon safeguarding and healing, with a reassessment of Safeguarding Sunday looking to rename, refocus and resituate it, with the preparation of appropriate ritual and resources, including an annual commissioning of local safeguarding people.**

****That the Archdiocese, in dialogue with survivors, implement processes that seek forgiveness for historical failings, recognising and addressing their needs. This could include a formal apology to survivors and their families, symbolic plaques and/or artwork in significant locations, theological reflection on sexual abuse within the Church which ought to be a place of refuge and safety, retreats and days of prayer that can foster healing, and the training of appropriately gifted people to undertake a ministry to survivors and their families.**

Plenary Council Decree 3: Called by Christ, Sent Forth as Missionary Disciples

The focus here is on the Church as a community of welcome for all, but especially for those who have been marginalised or excluded, listening to their stories and creating safe and hospitable spaces for them within the Church.

Archdiocesan Synod Action Plans

*****That an Archdiocesan family and intergenerational ministry working group be formed to develop and implement a holistic, intergenerational and inclusive**

approach to family faith-formation across educational and other Archdiocesan agencies in order to foster lifelong missionary discipleship.

That this working group explore ways of **strengthening partnerships between parishes, schools, communities and agencies, develop and implement sacramental resources for children with diverse learning needs and disabilities, including training for sacramental coordinators and volunteers to use the resources, develop a safe and supportive network for parents and carers of children and young people who may need additional support to feel welcome, offer advice upon request at decision-making tables at all levels of Archdiocesan governance.

*That there be **in self-nominated Mass centres the Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations catering for diverse needs** within the community, provided with resourcing around mentorship, formation, training and succession-planning for self-nominated clergy, religious and laity.

***That the Archdiocese provide **facilitated listening sessions, workshops and forums for safe and supportive story-telling, truth-telling and dialogue**, in order to raise awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by those who are marginalised and disenfranchised.

That with the support and mentorship of the Archdiocesan Council for Ecumenism and Interreligious Relations, Queensland Churches Together and the Queensland Faith Communities Council, **a co-responsible deanery approach to ecumenism and interreligious relations be developed and implemented, including short courses on ecumenism and interreligious relations, formation of individuals for work in ecumenical and interreligious relations, ecumenical retreats and pilgrimages, ecumenical and interreligious youth summits.

***That **a strategic approach to mission in the digital environment be developed and implemented**, focusing on the creation of digital media within a Catholic context, formation and training of people to work in the field, and including research into the possibilities and challenges of engaging the sacramental life of the Church through digital platforms such as live-streamed liturgies.

That the Archdiocese develop **a pastoral ministry in sport, including formation and support programs and research into best practice and recommended qualifications, training and study pathways for sports chaplains.

Plenary Council Decree 4: Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men

The focus here is on ensuring that the Church is a place where the equal dignity of women and men is respected and where the gifts of both women and men are identified and allowed to flourish for the sake of leadership within the Body of Christ.

Archdiocesan Synod Action Plans

*That, if the universal law of the Church were modified to **admit women to diaconal ordination**, the Archdiocese examine how best to implement it in the context of the Church in Brisbane.

***That a **fulltime role of Executive Officer for Participation** be established to design, implement and resource a plan for the full co-responsible participation of lay women and men in the life and mission of the Church.

That a **reference group be established to explore options for the use of inclusive language in prayer, liturgy, scripture and all Archdiocesan communications.

*That a **research project be established to explore the theological foundations of diverse understandings of women in the Church**, leading to an assembly on co-responsibility of all the baptised in the life and mission of the Church.

***That a **pilot program be established to support financially the postgraduate education and formation of lay women and men** in various areas of interest and importance to the Church, with the Archdiocese providing the initial funds with a view to establishing a foundation. A transparent application process would be overseen by the Archdiocesan Synod Council (see Action Plan 7) and approved finally by the Archbishop.

Plenary Council Decree 5: Communion in Grace, Sacrament to the World

The focus here is on the need to identify and foster the charisms given by God and to encourage new forms of ministry to supply the needs of the Church not only internally, for the sake of worship, but also externally, for the sake of mission.

Archdiocesan Synod Action Plans

That a **ministry of front-of-house hospitality be developed and implemented for secretaries and other administrative staff in parishes and communities, recognising and formalising what is often happening, offering training and networking opportunities to those engaged in the ministry, devising processes of recruitment and care of those called to the ministry, and developing resources to help those engaged in the ministry.

***That the Archdiocese explore fully the possibilities of **the ministries of catechist, lector and acolyte and consider what other ministries**, open to all, instituted or not, might be needed to meet new needs.

***That the Archdiocese establish a **Ministries Discernment Committee** to oversee the recruitment, formation, commissioning, institution and continuing education of those preparing for or carrying out such ministries.

That the Archdiocese support and provide **resources for lay-led liturgies where appropriate, particularly for parishes and communities without regular access to clergy.

That the Archdiocese give permission for **lay people to preside at Catholic funerals and baptisms, indicating the circumstances in which this would be permitted and providing both discernment process and training programs for those involved in this ministry.

****That the Archdiocese give permission for lay people to preside at Catholic weddings** (in line with Chapter III of the Order of Celebrating Matrimony), indicating the circumstances in which this might occur and the process of delegation.

****That the Archdiocese promote the participation of lay people in the ministry of preaching** within the Sunday Mass and elsewhere, identifying the situations in which a lay person might offer a reflection during Mass, providing adequate training and support which would include sessions on how to run a Scripture study group, how to write and deliver a Lectionary-based reflection on the readings, how to make best use of the Directory for Masses with Children, drawing upon the resources of Archdiocesan agencies and organisations.

*****That the Archdiocese develop and implement a project supporting the integration of families into parishes and communities** in order to promote their sense of belonging and engagement in the life of the Church, providing resources to facilitate the incorporation of families into the community both before and after the sacraments of initiation and resources to support family catechesis when preparing children for the sacraments.

****That the Archdiocese establish a network of groups working in marriage education and enrichment**, including marriage preparation for engaged couples and ongoing accompaniment for married couples.

*****That the Archdiocese develop and implement a formation strategy on the sacrament of penance** and the many ways in which God's mercy is experienced in Christian life and liturgy, providing resources and examples, such as ritual outlines for the celebration of the sacrament of penance, including the second rite, offering retreat opportunities for different age-groups to enable them to experience the sacrament of penance, and revising the current sacramental policy on the provision of first penance for children.

Plenary Council Decree 6: Formation and Leadership for Mission and Ministry

The focus here is on providing in a variety of ways the formation needed for ordained and non-ordained leadership in the Church, so that leaders will be properly equipped for the ministry to which they are called.

Archdiocesan Synod Action Plans

*****That the Archdiocese develop a plan for ministry and leadership formation**, including a working group representing key people in formation and developing resources and programs on missional and synodal leadership such as podcasts, online modules and retreats, particularly for emerging leaders who have skills and qualifications equipping them for governance, leadership and other decision-making roles.

***That the Archdiocese develop and implement opportunities for lay people to be engaged in ongoing spiritual growth beyond the liturgical context**, including in

small groups that meet regularly for prayer, bible study, reflection on Church documents, and spiritual accompaniment.

*That parishes and deaneries offer **formation events drawing upon experts** to reflect on key topics such as prayer, scripture, sacraments, marriage and family, mission, care for our common home and inclusivity.

That **pathways for greater lay involvement in the ongoing formation of clergy and the formation of seminarians be identified, providing avenues for accompaniment of clergy by lay people and assisting pastors to work with a small group of lay people to provide regular feedback on homilies, based on an agreed criteria matrix.

***That the Archdiocese develop and implement a **road-map for a mission-focused Church that is synodal and co-responsible**, including localised and ongoing conversations in the Spirit as a regular part of planning, decision-making, pastoral care and community-building.

That the Archdiocese teach simply and systematically **the discipline and method of conversation in the Spirit as a way of discernment, attempting to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit in listening to each other.

*That the Archdiocese produce **podcasts and digital media resources** exploring what it means to read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel.

***That the Archdiocese, at a time when the ethnic profile of the Catholic Church is changing both locally and globally, organise **forums on interculturality** in a **missional, synodal and co-responsible Church**.

***That a **SYNOD24 Formation and Implementation Plan** be developed and implemented, providing opportunities for formation in all eight Action Plans and including resources and workshops in areas such as how to share faith with friends, how to engage with scripture, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island spirituality, integral ecology, sacraments and sacramentality, inclusive theology, the role of women in the Church, ecumenism and interreligious relations.

***That the Archdiocese offer **workshops and practical resources on how to implement the SYNOD24 Action Plans** in parishes, communities and agencies across the Archdiocese.

Plenary Council Decree 7: At the Service of Communion, Participation and Mission: Governance

The focus here is on the governance of the Church in a synodal key, looking to synods as a regular feature of Church life and to synodality as the characteristic of all aspects of Church governance for the sake of mission.

Archdiocesan Synod Action Plans

***That the Archdiocese commit to celebrating **Synods on a regular basis**, so that this key element of synodality become a normal part of Archdiocesan life.

***That the Archdiocese establish a **Synod Council** which will meet regularly through the year between the Synods, members committing to formation in and practice of conversation in the Spirit as a key element of meetings and to formation in the nature and purpose of the Council.

That the Council commit to **diverse representation including a mix of lay women and men, religious and the ordained.

That the Archdiocese prepare **Statutes for the Council.

That the Archdiocese develop and implement a **project to operate at deanery level to identify lay people who are women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, persons with a disability or from a cultural community, and who seem suitable to serve on councils and committees in the parish or the Archdiocese with the right kind of mentorship, accompaniment and formation, especially in the areas of synodality, co-responsibility and mission.

That the Archdiocese develop and implement a **parish handover process that includes consultation with members of the parish, especially the Parish Pastoral Council, and the preparation of a statement of what the parish expects of a pastor.

*That there be in the Archdiocese **regular performance reviews of pastors** to identify areas of strength and areas for growth, with ongoing professional supervision to foster growth.

Plenary Council Decree 8: Integral Ecology and Conversion for the Sake of Our Common Home

The focus here is on the need for ecological conversion in the life and mission of the Church, understanding that the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are the one thing, and that ecological conversion must lead to action.

Archdiocesan Synod Action Plans

***That an **integral ecology formation strategy** be developed and implemented for clergy, community leaders, agency staff and parishioners, to be revised every three years, helping them to grow in understanding of integral ecology and its impact on our behaviour and drawing where appropriate on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wisdom, and engaging with already existing eco-spirituality resources.

*That all organisations, parishes and schools writing a *Laudato Si* Action Plan include a **framework for measuring and reporting emission reduction** that leads to a considered net zero pathway that includes commitment and timeframes.

*That, in addition to the emission reduction strategies, **Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) priorities** be developed in the Archdiocese with a view to

assisting all agencies, parishes and communities to embed measurable ESG outcomes into their future *Laudato Si* Action Plans.

***That **an Ecological Ministry Strategic Plan be developed and implemented** to support ecological ministry throughout the Archdiocese, recruiting deanery representatives to create hubs that support ecological ministers overseen by a coordinator employed by the Archdiocese to support action in parishes and communities.

*That **intergenerational and family initiatives** be developed to promote the call to care for our common home.

*That parishes, **communities and agencies share their activities** in the area of ecological engagement at events and through avenues of communication, and that **cross-agency collaboration** in this area be coordinated and encouraged throughout the Archdiocese.

***That the Archdiocese produce **guidelines and resources for parish clergy and liturgy coordinators indicating ways in which a commitment to integral ecology can be integrated into liturgical celebrations.**

Some of these action plans already have currency in one form or other in the Archdiocese, or at least in some parts of the Archdiocese. The task will be to give greater impetus and focus to those that already have currency, but also to set in motion the processes to which others look.

Not all the action plans will be able to be implemented immediately, but none of them can be delayed indefinitely. Therefore, priorities will have to be set in the hope that the action plans will have been implemented within five years. Budgeting will also need to be considered, as will the question of who has carriage of the various initiatives.

There will need to be a group to oversee the implementation of the action plans, the Synod Council will also be charged with oversight of a broader kind, and the Archdiocesan Synods will monitor progress. Yet this is a document not just for some. It is for everyone; and I urge all parishes, communities, agencies and individuals to read and reflect upon the action plans and to be as creative as possible in implementing them.

These action plans are comprehensive but not exhaustive. There are things not mentioned in this document which are important for the future of the Archdiocese of Brisbane. For instance, we will certainly need to consider restructuring our parishes and even our schools, looking not so much to amalgamation but more to building a "community of communities". How to engage young people more energetically in the life of the Church is another question not prominent in these action plans but essential for the future of the Church. How to be more effective in teaching prayer as a way of life, the art of listening to God in prayer and the contemplative eye upon the world: this is another. The list could go on. This is another way of saying that these action plans should be read in conjunction with my own document "With Lamps Ablaze"

which sets out a number of what I called apostolic priorities for the Archdiocese. These interweave with the action plans found here.

I direct that these synodal declarations and decrees which I sign in accord with can. 466 be published to the entire community of the Archdiocese and that a copy be forwarded to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference as required by can. 467.

I thank all who have been part of the Synod journey, having heard the Lord's promise to "make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). I commend these action plans to the grace of the Holy Spirit from whom this process has come forth and to the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, St Stephen and St Mary of the Cross MacKillop. May God who has begun the good work in us bring it to fulfilment (cf Philippians 1:6).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Phillipson', written over a horizontal line.

Archbishop of Brisbane

14 November 2024