

Frequently Asked Questions

of the Diocesan Synod to the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

What is Synodality?

The word 'Synod' indicates the path made together by the People of God and therefore it refers to Jesus Christ who presents himself as 'the way, the truth and the life' and to the fact that Christians, following him, were originally called 'the disciples of the way.'

Synodality then, is the People of God which concretely manifests and realises its being communion in walking together, in gathering in assembly and actively participating with all its members in its mission of evangelizing.

The Church must engage with what the spirit is doing now and this primarily involves listening and discerning, drawing on the wisdom and life-experience of God's people, especially those at the margins.

What is the Plenary Council?

A Plenary Council is the highest formal gathering of all local churches in a country. Plenary Council 2020 is being held so that we can dialogue about the future of the Catholic Church in Australia. Contemporary society in Australia has changed significantly and the Plenary Council is being held in order to give the Catholic community in Australia time to listen, dialogue and discern with one another and guided by the Holy Spirit, about the future, the role and relevance of the Catholic Church in Australia.

What are the Themes for the Plenary Council and our Diocesan Synod?

The people of Australia are being asked:

*How is God calling us to be a **Christ-centred Church** that is:*

- Missionary and evangelising
- Inclusive, participatory and synodal
- Humble, healing and merciful
- Prayerful and Eucharistic
- A joyful, hope-filled and servant community
- Open to conversion, renewal and reform

What is the Council of Priests?

Can. 495 §1. In each diocese a presbyteral council is to be established, that is, a group of priests which, representing the presbyterium, is to be like a senate of the bishop and which assists the bishop in the governance of the diocese according to the norm of law to promote as much as possible the pastoral good of the portion of the people of God entrusted to him.

What is the Council for Mission?

The Council for Mission is a key strategic diocesan advisory group to the Bishop. Its purpose is to provide the prophetic voice of the Spirit and a broader vision, so God's mission is revealed and lived out actively within and outside the local church.

People have been chosen and called, because of their specific gifts. The Council is a representative group not a group of representatives. It is hoped that by building up a sense of trust and unity among all peoples, the diocese will be recognised as a visible and credible sign and instrument of communion with God and so fulfil its mission.

The Council for Mission fulfils the canonical role of the Diocesan Pastoral Council as per Canons 511 – 514

Who is on the Council for Mission?

<https://www.mn.catholic.org.au/media/4244/members-cfm-2020.pdf>

What is the Diocesan Synod (2019 – 2021)?

A Synod - the word means "journeying together" - is a formal assembly of representatives of the whole diocesan community: clergy, religious and lay people. Through the Synod process, which involves collaboration, discernment, governance and communion, the Bishop seeks advice on matters concerning the good of the whole diocese. Declarations and decrees are promulgated which set the direction for the diocese in the form of a Diocesan Pastoral Plan. So, Diocesan Synods are important instruments and occasions for effecting renewal.

The last Diocesan Synod was held in 1992/93 and since then, parishes within the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle have been journeying together through assemblies and gatherings in which they have been discerning the voice of the Spirit.

Bishop William Wright issued a decree convoking a new Diocesan Synod, the first since 1992/93 on 8th August 2019, on the Feast of Mary MacKillop.

The theme of the Synod (2019 – 2021) is "Building the Kingdom of God together".

The Diocesan Synod to be held in three sessions (2019, 2020 & 2021) will invite people to carefully discern together what the spirit is saying to the Church of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle and agree on common goals and actions for the coming years.

What is the Diocesan Synod Working Party?

The Diocesan Synod Working Party is a small group of people from the Council for Mission and diocesan staff who meet regularly to dialogue, reflect, consult, collaborate, pray, discern and organise the processes for the diocesan synod

How many meetings/sessions are there for the Plenary Council and Diocesan Synod?

Plenary Council

First Assembly of the Plenary Council – 4 – 11 October - Adelaide (postponed due to COVID – 19)

Second Assembly of the Plenary Council – 28 June to 3 July 2020 - Sydney

Diocesan Synod

Diocesan Synod Celebration – 23 November 2019

Diocesan Synod Discernment – 21 November 2020 (postponed due to COVID – 19)

Diocesan Synod Implementation – 20 November 2021

Who are our diocesan delegates to the Plenary Council and Diocesan Synod

Plenary Council

The “local churches” – dioceses, eparchies, ordinariates and personal prelature – have confirmed their delegates for the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia. These can be found on the Plenary Council website <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/delegates/>

The following delegates will represent the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle:

- Most Reverend William Joseph Wright DD
- Very Reverend Andrew Peter Doohan VG
- Dr Helen Maria Belcher
- Ms Bernadette Frances Gibson

Presently 267 delegates have been called. Seminary rectors and heads of theological institutions, who must be called to a plenary council, are currently listed within the geographical diocese in which they are located.

A number of representatives of national organisations are still to be named as delegates who may be called. The appointment and/or resignation of bishops and other Church leaders could also affect the final list of delegates.

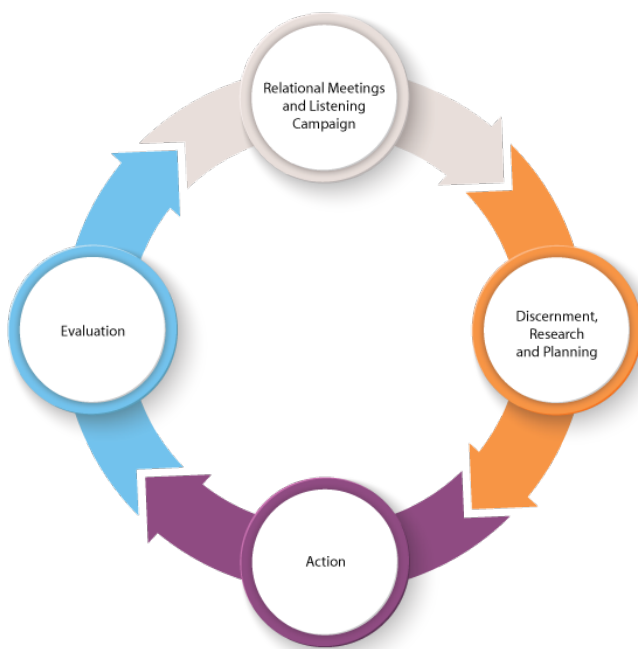
Diocesan Synod

The first session of the Diocesan Synod, held in November 2019, was an open session with about 400 people participating. It is yet to be determined if the second session will be open or if delegates will be called. Once decided, delegates are called to be representative of the whole diocesan community. It is proposed that if the decision is made to have delegates then the rest of the diocesan community could be invited as participants.

A Diocesan Synod Directory based on Instructions for Diocesan Synods (1997) will need to be developed.

What are the significant elements to our Organising/Planning Cycle?

The following organising cycle or planning model is helpful for our synodal process:



It starts with **relating and listening**. We believe that before you act together you need to know and trust each other, whether inside an organisation or between the most diverse organisations you can imagine. Over several years the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle has been conducting listening campaigns which have formed a considerable amount of data, including the data collected during the Listening and Dialogue process of the Plenary Council and the diocesan synod workshops.

But we don't want relationships just for the sake of it, relationships are the means by which we can make a difference in our lives, and how our church can become a more relevant community-based organisation. So, we move from relating and listening to **research and planning**, to work out how we can most

effectively work together to make a difference. This involves deep prayer, reflection and discernment.

Then, we move to **action**. We want relationships that don't just talk and plan for change, but that act. We want to do what we say we will do.

Finally, we **evaluate**. We seek to learn from everything we do. To reflect and improve our practice.

And, then it goes back to relating and listening – because we always can and need to deepen and broaden our public relationships.

What is the work of the Diocesan Synod Focus Groups?

As part of the processes identified by the Diocesan Synod Working Party, four Focus Groups have been established to prepare for the Synod by addressing tasks identified during the listening and dialogue processes of the Plenary Council and Diocesan Synod.

A. Foundational Guiding Principles

To develop a spiritually inspiring document that will reflect the vision of how we the Church of Maitland-Newcastle will work together to further Jesus' mission in today's world.

B. Discernment of Data

To process data relevant to the Plenary Council and Diocesan Synod that has been generated thus far within and beyond the diocese, and from that data develop recommendations for discernment by the diocesan community and in time by the Synod.

C. Diocesan Directory

To compile and review all of the documentation that has provided direction for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle since the last Diocesan Synod of 1992/93, and recommend the ongoing ratification or abrogation of that documentation.

D. Governance/Guiding Principles

To develop clear documentation concerning the structures of the diocese and the principles on which the diocesan community is governed both canonically and legally.

How will we be meeting in between the sessions of our Diocesan Synod?

Forums and Gatherings across the Diocese

We are people of faith who believe that God loves us. We are therefore called into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

It is proposed that Regional Gatherings will provide an opportunity for formation, particularly around the *Sensus fidelum*. These will provide opportunities for the Diocesan Synod Working Party and Focus Groups to present information to smaller groups of people and for the Council of Priests and Council for Mission to listen and discern. This will assist in preparing the documentation to be presented at the second session of the diocesan synod.

Formation opportunities will also be provided in the form of forums and reflection days.

These days will provide people with the opportunity to envision the Church of the future.

Due to COVID – 19 the planning for these community events has been postponed until we can once again gather face-to-face.

