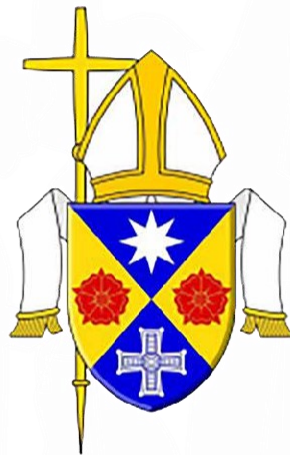




For a synodal Church

communion | participation | mission

Diocesan Consultation March-April 2024



Sandhurst Diocesan Summary





Synod 2021-2024

For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Diocese of Sandhurst recognises the traditional owners of the lands upon which we live, serve and worship.

We acknowledge the people of the Northeastern regions of our Diocese, Djilmathang, Minjajambuta, Duduroa and Waywurru. We acknowledge the people of the Southern regions of our Diocese, the Dja Dja Wurrung and the Taungerung. We acknowledge the people of the Northern regions of our Diocese, the Yorta Yorta and Bangerang. We acknowledge the people of the Western regions of our Diocese, the Baraparapa peoples.

We respectfully honour and acknowledge their ongoing custodianship and their connections to the land, waters and animals. We pay our respects to their culture, their Elders, past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of their peoples. We express our gratitude in the sharing of this land, our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing and commit ourselves to actively working alongside First Nations People for healing, reconciliation and justice.

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THE THEME OF THIS SYNOD*



Communion

The communion we share finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of the Trinity. Together, we are inspired by listening to the Word of God, through the living Tradition of the Church, and grounded in the *sensus fidei* that we share. We all have a role to play in discerning and living out God's call for his people.



Participation

Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and are called to serve one another through the gifts they have each received from the Holy Spirit in baptism. In a synodal Church the whole community is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will.



Mission

Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process has a deeply missionary dimension to it. It is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world.

*<https://www.synod.va/en/resources.html>

INTRODUCTION

Groups contributing to this summary

The consultation process was managed by the Sandhurst Office of Mission and Pastoral Life (OMPL) located at the Diocesan Chancery. By combining an 'open invitation' and 'targeted' approaches, a broad cross-section of the people of God have been given the opportunity to participate. Teams of local priests and laity led 'open invitation' consultation sessions in the three geographical deaneries of the Diocese, with administrative and logistical support provided by the OMPL. Two deanery teams chose to conduct sessions online and the third team opted for an in-person gathering. A number of other groups and organisations were targeted by the OMPL, including: young people who had been part of the Sandhurst pilgrimage to World Youth Day 2023 in Lisbon; a parish youth group; members of the Sandhurst Mission and Pastoral Council (Diocesan Pastoral Council); staff of the Diocesan Chancery and the Catholic Education Office Sandhurst; and, members of the lay led ecclesial movement 'Teams of Our Lady'.¹ A submission was also received from lay faithful in the diocese who are members of the Australian Catalyst for Renewal forum.

Some of these groups conducted the consultation online and others were conducted in-person. Most consultations were facilitated by volunteers both priests and laity, whilst three consultations were facilitated by the OMPL. In total, fourteen groups made submissions with an estimated two hundred and thirty individual participants involved. Submissions were received from the groups through an online portal set-up by the OMPL.

Chapters and themes addressed by the groups

In general, this Summary addresses Chapters 8-12, 16 and 18 of the *Synthesis Report* which were highlighted as relevant to the reflection questions in the Diocesan Consultation Reflection Guide provided by the Australian Catholic Bishops Commission. However, some local adaptations were made to both the process and the questions.

¹ *Équipe Notre-Dame.*

These adaptations were designed to assist facilitators to adapt the consultation for groups with diverse membership. The adapted process included a time for participants to explore and unpack some of the key terms used in the *Synthesis Report* that may have been unfamiliar to them.² The questions for group reflection, listening, dialogue and feedback were presented in a simplified way, whilst still maintaining their integrity and were clearly relatable to those proposed in the Diocesan Consultation Reflection Guide.

The Diocesan summary presents themes relating to genuine encounter; the importance of prayer and listening, dialogue and discernment; consultative and participatory structures; existing, renewed and new ministry roles.

² The key terms: synod, communion, participation, mission, differentiated, co-responsible.



SUMMARY

How can we enhance the differentiated co-responsibility in the mission of all the members of the people of God?

All groups affirmed the dignity of all the baptised and their vocation in sharing responsibility for mission. Repeatedly and in different ways, many responses emphasised the importance of those in ministerial leadership being able to recognise and *acknowledge* each person and their unique gifts and strengths, their current and potential contribution to the Church in mission. In other words, the range, depth and quality of the human encounters was seen to be critical when seeking to enhance differentiated co-responsibility of the people of God. However, many groups expressed concern that, as a rule, both clergy and laity alike failed when it came to this leadership task as they were far too passive and inward looking. A reluctance to look beyond the line of sight, to stretch outside the zone of comfort, to truly *recognise* and *acknowledge* people in their ordinary and even messy particularity was identified as a significant block to enhancing differentiated co-responsibility in the mission of all the members of the people of God.

This lack of vision contradicts Pope Francis' call that there is room for everyone in the Church, and to actively seek out and include those who are on the outside.³ Moreover, the *Synthesis Report* speaks of the role and significance of young people "with their gifts and fragilities" to advancing the mission.⁴ Whilst this theme is not exclusive to the recognition and acknowledgement of young people, the broader criticism here is of a type of Church leadership (and membership) that seems quite comfortable with "gifts" but is not always ready to sit with "fragilities", or has a blind spot in relation to this call to embrace the complex realities of people's lives. In summary, groups were concerned that a lack of active commitment to genuine encounter through the recognition and acknowledgement of persons in their particularity communicates a message that is counter to Pope Francis' call to outreach and inclusion for those who feel overlooked, ignored, excluded or marginalised.

³ Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* (2013) nn. 24, 114, 165. Reiterated at the XXXVII World Youth Day Welcome Ceremony in Portugal, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, XXXVII World Youth Day Welcome Ceremony, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/august/documents/20230803-portogallo-cerimonia-accoglienza.html>

⁴ *Synthesis Report*, Chapter 8f.

A significant and recurring theme in the responses to this question was the need for deep attitudinal change for the whole Church, to an ongoing conversion of mind and heart leading to a proactive turning toward and outreach to those who yearn to belong, to be seen and heard, to be recognised and acknowledged. Those in ministerial leadership were regarded as exercising a key role in this transformation, and yet all the baptised are co-responsible for missionary and pastoral outreach. Flowing from this call to ongoing conversion will be the renewal of structures, strategies and resources that promote the valuing of all people and their voices through active outreach and by the provision of differentiated outreach and a variety of entry points. Thus, several groups named the clarity of roles, the co-ordination of responsibilities and the urgent need for the recognition and inclusion of women as crucial elements in ongoing formation and in the renewal of structures.



What ways of relating, structures, processes or discernment and decision making with regard to mission make it possible to recognise, shape and promote co-responsibility?

Approximately half of the participants in the Diocesan consultation were Church employees, either at the Chancery or the Catholic Education Office. A common theme that emerged from these participants was the value placed on intentional acts of *recognition* and *acknowledgment* of employees and their contribution to the missionary endeavours of their respective organisations. Opportunities for prayer, reflection and quality formation were highlighted as helpful events, activities and rituals. Given the diversity of these workplaces, the climate in which these events, activities and rituals take place was also seen as important. Environments that encouraged and expected individuals and groups to practice the art of deep listening, to speak freely and boldly, and gave participants the freedom and permission to ask questions without the fear being judged as ignorant or impertinent were highly valued and assisted in the recognition, shaping and promotion of co-responsibility.

In a similar way, consultative structures at parish and Diocesan level that function effectively and encouraged listening, dialogue and discernment were affirmed as helpful in recognising, shaping and promoting co-responsibility for mission. Existing parish and Diocesan ministries, supported with regular and ongoing formation, were also highlighted as supportive of co-responsibility.

The value of conducting face-to-face meetings and events wherever possible was a recurring theme of this consultation. While acknowledging the ease and accessibility of online meetings and events, many groups expressed a strong preference for the face-to-face mode, viewing them as far more effective than online ones for promoting and nurturing a culture of genuine encounter. Sitting “across the table” from one’s fellows, lay and ordained, single and married, young and old, created the conditions for conversion of mind and heart, for recognition and acknowledgment of the unique presence and contribution of each participant and an unrivalled power to shape co-responsibility for mission among the people of God.

Ways of relating and processes that engage all the senses and encourage the use of imagination through art, music and the sharing of story were highlighted as creating the conditions for promoting co-responsibility for mission. Immersive and embodied activities, such as participating in pilgrimages like an international World Youth Day, were seen as highly valuable in assisting young people to recognise and begin the journey to claiming a sense co-responsibility for the mission.

A consistent theme was the role and significance of prayer and the importance of imbuing structures, processes and decision-making with a sense of the sacred through ongoing prayerful reflection.

What ministries and participatory bodies can be renewed or introduced to better express this co-responsibility?

All groups embraced the renewal of the ministry roles of lector and the diaconate as named in the *Synthesis Report* (Chapters 8, 9 and 11). The proposal in Chapter 8(n) to expand the existing ministry of lector to a ministry of the Word of God, including

preaching, received an overwhelmingly positive response. High quality initial and ongoing formation (human, spiritual, pastoral and theological) of all who are called to ministry was seen as essential and a responsibility shared by the person called and appointed and the parish, school or Diocesan group sponsoring the ministry. The ongoing formation of priests, with special attention to those recently arrived from overseas was viewed as vital for their growth as pastors and the flourishing of parish life. Many groups emphasised that, whilst there are different roles for the ordained and the laity, all the baptised share co-responsibility for the formation of priests. However, many also expressed the view that existing structures should be redesigned to formally include and involve the lay faithful and especially women, in these structures. The value of formal and informal feedback for all priests to assist in their human and spiritual development was highlighted.

Every group in the consultation identified the importance of providing more opportunities for women to participate in ministry as a condition of the adequate expression of co-responsibility of mission. Attitudes and behaviours that exclude or deny the gifts and contribution of women must continue to be challenged and eradicated from the Church.

The possibility of women being admitted to a renewed diaconate was welcomed and seen as a sign of hope by many.

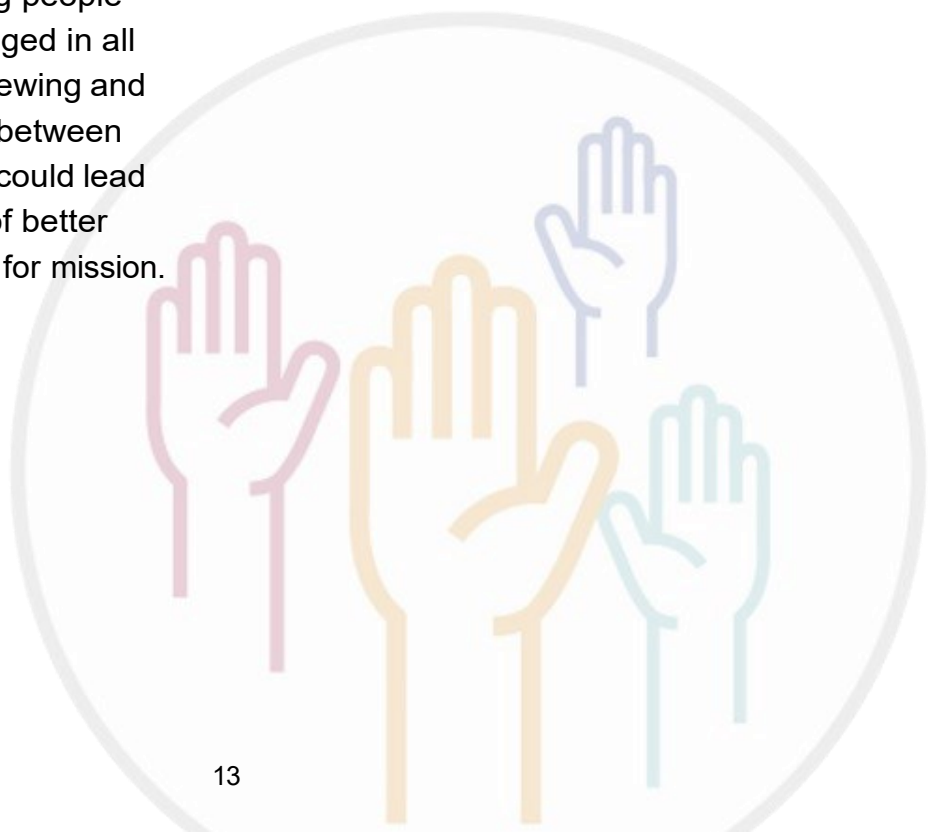
Parish pastoral councils and diocesan pastoral councils were viewed by many as essential in the expression of co-responsibility for mission. Several groups called for the Church to change Canon Law, thereby making it mandatory for all parishes and dioceses to establish and maintain pastoral councils. Furthermore, almost all groups expressed the belief that these participatory bodies must operate in a manner characterised by a commitment to prayerful listening, dialogue and discernment. It was noted by many that this commitment should be exercised and made visible in two ways: through meeting protocols and processes and in the manner that members consult with the people of God. Experiencing, practicing and becoming skilled in the art of listening, dialogue and discernment were identified as critical to the renewal of participatory bodies and in the exercise of ministerial leadership.

Many groups resonated with the recommendation of the *Synthesis Report* that the Church needs a “preferential option for young people”.⁵ These groups also identified gaps and deficiencies in ministry with and among young people. Some viewed these gaps and deficiencies as opportunities for a new form of intentional intergenerational ministry to emerge through the “facilitation of spaces” with the young, inviting them to engage with existing participatory structures and ministries. Many pointed to the positive and hopeful way in which Catholic secondary schools in the Sandhurst Diocese exercise their ministry with young people. These groups suggested that much could be learned from Catholic schools about intergenerational ministry and the art of facilitating spaces where young people are recognised and acknowledged in all “their gifts and fragilities”.⁶ Renewing and strengthening the relationship between parishes and Catholic schools could lead to the creation and discovery of better expressions of co-responsibility for mission.

Some groups dwelt on the role and significance of modern communications media, including social media as a potentially powerful tool in the promotion of co-responsibility. One group captured the importance of social media by describing it as “digital table of encounter” for many people, especially the young. A renewed communications ministry could provide a pathway for the kind of authentic *recognition* and *acknowledgment* that many people, especially the young, are yearning for and seeking through their use of social media.

5 Chapter 16 e).

6 *Synthesis Report*, Chapter 8f, and above p.8.



KEY POINTS OF THIS SUMMARY

- Differentiated co-responsibility is enhanced by the *recognition* and *acknowledgment* of each person and their unique gifts and strengths, their current and potential contribution to the Church in mission. This is a particular responsibility of those called to ministerial leadership but is also shared by the entire people of God.
- Genuine encounter creates the conditions for the recognition and acknowledgment of the other in their unique dignity as a person made in the image and likeness of God.
- Participatory structures such as pastoral councils must be established and maintained at parish and diocesan level.



- The skills and art of listening, dialogue and discernment are essential in recognising, shaping and promoting co-responsibility for mission.
- Prayer and prayerful reflection are essential to the ongoing conversion of the people of God and for the renewal and expansion of ministry and the recognising, shaping and promoting of co-responsibility for mission.
- The renewal and expansion of ministry roles such as lector, and the diaconate will be welcomed. The creation of new ministries, such as a ministry of the Word of God should also be considered. Initial and ongoing formation for all who are called to ministry is essential.
- Renewal of approaches to youth ministry, intergenerational ministry and communications ministry will be welcomed by the people of God in the Sandhurst Diocese.



APPENDIX: DIOCESAN TESTIMONY, SANDHURST AUSTRALIA¹

What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word 'synod'. Journeying together — laity, pastors, Bishops — is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice. Pope Francis, 17 October 2015.

Whilst this testimony reflects on our more recent Diocesan story, it builds on the efforts of Sandhurst priests and the lay faithful over many, many years.

On 27 April 2022 the Feast of Our Lady of Good Council, Bishop Shane Mackinlay announced a year of preparation and consultation for a Diocesan Pastoral Council, to be known as the Sandhurst Mission and Pastoral Council (SMPC). Following the Bishop's announcement, staff of the Diocesan Office for Mission and Pastoral Life (OMPL) developed documentation and processes for preparation and consultation meetings to be held throughout the diocese from July through to December.

The meetings enabled participants to learn about the proposed Council, to enter a listening and dialogue process and provide feedback to the Bishop. By 13 December we had met with the priests and representatives of the lay-faithful in thirty-nine parishes, senior students and staff representing ten Catholic secondary colleges, all Catholic school Principals and Religious Education Leaders, Catholic Education Office Sandhurst staff, the Boards of Catholic Education Sandhurst Limited and Sandhurst Catholic Early Childhood Education and Care Limited as well as representatives of St John of God Hospital. 905 people participated in these meetings and more than 279 collected group responses were received, providing a rich source of data that helped inform the focus, direction and processes to be adopted by the Council.

1. Submitted to the General Secretariat of the Synod on 15 May 2024 by the National Catholic Pastoral Research Centre in Canberra. The testimony shares the work done and experiences of synodality in the Diocese



In January 2023 the Final Report on the Preparation and Consultation for the Sandhurst Mission and Pastoral Council was published, with strong and consistent themes emerging from the fifty-two preparation and consultation meetings conducted across the diocese in the second half of 2022. The themes were: “authentic listening and dialogue”, “inclusion and openness”, “communication”, “a bias for action” and “hope in the face of cynicism and hurt”. The themes were presented at the Diocesan Assembly and have helped inform the establishment, operations and workplan of the SMPC. As expected, a strong alignment emerged between these themes and the Diocesan Synthesis for the Synod on Synodality and the decrees of 5th Plenary Council of Australia.

On 15 February 2023 three hundred and twenty-seven members of our diocesan community assembled in Kialla: priests, parish pastoral and finance council members, pastoral associates, parish volunteers, parishioners, school principals, students, Catholic Education Office Sandhurst (CEOS) staff and Chancery staff.

A makeshift venue was transformed by a hardworking team from the Chancery and CEOS. The team created a working ‘synodal’ space for participants in the assembly to pray, sing, reflect, learn, listen, speak, and make concrete proposals for action to Bishop Shane for the Sandhurst Mission and Pastoral Council. At the conclusion of the Assembly, Bishop Shane called for expressions of interest from priests and the lay faithful from diocese to join the Council.

After a process of discernment, the members of the Sandhurst Mission and Pastoral Council were appointed in late March. At the annual Mass of Oils on 4 April 2023, three priests and eleven lay people from each of the deaneries were commissioned by Bishop Shane to join him and Fr Joe Taylor VG on the Council.

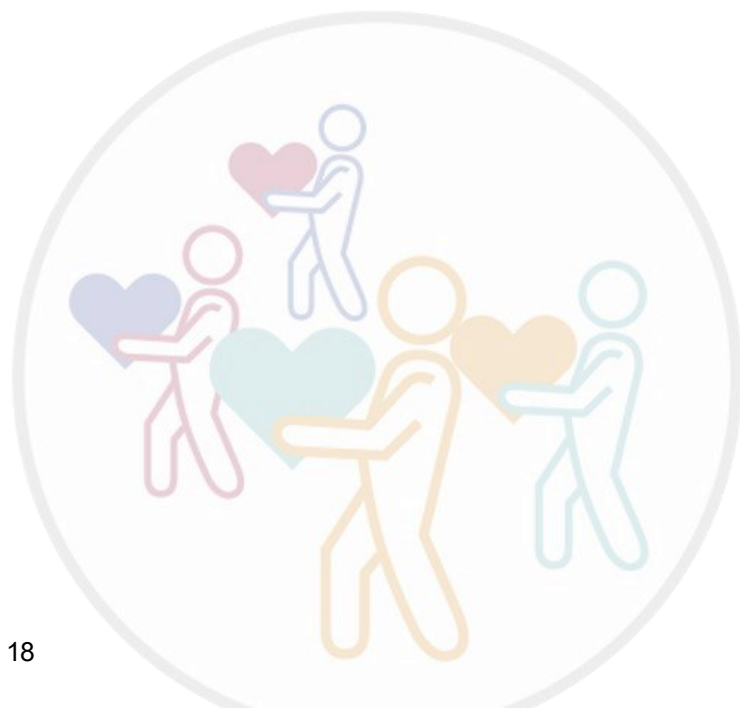


APPENDIX: DIOCESAN TESTIMONY, SANDHURST AUSTRALIA¹, CONTINUED

The Council has met six times since then and following prayerful reflection on the themes from the Final Report and the two hundred and fifty-two proposals from the Assembly, four strategic directions have emerged: missionary and pastoral outreach, the promotion of unity and connections between Diocesan groups and entities, initial and ongoing formation, and the promotion of the equal dignity of women and men. The Council is developing priorities, goals and actions to address the strategic directions. The Council have also made recommendations to Bishop Shane for members of the lay faithful to attend regular meetings of Diocesan bodies. A member of the Council was appointed to the Diocesan Finance Council, and two lay people now attend meetings of the College of Consultors.

Along with dozens of parishioners and some priests from across the Diocese, members of the Council also participated in the 'Sandhurst Scripture Talks' which were held in May 2023 on Zoom. The topic was: The Acts of the Apostles: 'making decisions with the Holy Spirit'.

Our presenters were scripture scholars Rev Dr Brian Boyle EV (Administrator of the Cathedral Cluster of Parishes in Bendigo) and Dr Rosemary Canavan (Catholic Theological College, Melbourne). The presenters introduced us to the book of the Acts the Apostles and helped us understand how the early Christians sought the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit when making important decisions in the life of the Church. The learnings were invaluable as we discover together what it is to be a synodal church today.



In August and October 2023, the Office for Mission and Pastoral Life hosted four Zoom sessions entitled “Carrying Forward the Plenary Council”. Parishioners from across the diocese learnt a little more about Decree 1 (Reconciliation – Healing Wounds, Receiving Gifts) and Decree 3 (Called by Christ – Sent Forth as Missionary Disciples) and participated in a simple listening and dialogue exercise which any parish or group could undertake. The exercise invited parishioners to reflect on what their faith community was already doing or could do in relation to the Decree.

So, whilst the Plenary Council as an event has concluded and we await the final approval of the Decrees by the Holy See, the “Carrying Forward the Plenary Council” document reminds us that many of the Decrees contain the kinds of things that dioceses, parishes and other Catholic entities can do or are doing already.

Over the last three years parishioners have used the financial support provided by the Sandhurst Theology Scholarships to enrol in courses aimed at developing their theological knowledge and pastoral leadership capabilities.

A Diocesan Youth Ministry Reference Group was established in October 2023. This group provides advice to Bishop Shane and the Sandhurst Mission and Pastoral Council on the future direction and approach to Youth Ministry in Sandhurst.

We have learnt much about the challenges of putting the synodal way into practice and what it means to exercise co-responsibility for mission. We also have much to look forward to as we continue our synodal journey as the pilgrim people of God in Sandhurst.

