



TOWARD A MORE PRAYERFUL, CHRISTLIKE AND MISSIONARY CHURCH ***Pastoral Letter to the Archdiocese of Sydney regarding the Synod of Sydney 2026***

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The idea of a ‘synod’ has a long and rich history in the life of the Church. Since earliest times, there have been diocesan, regional or universal gatherings of the pastors of the Church, often with some leading lay faithful, to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to discern certain theological or pastoral matters.

We might think of the Council held in Jerusalem around the year 50 AD and described in chapter 15 of the *Acts of the Apostles*, to decide what parts of the Old Jewish Law still applied to Christians, especially the Gentile converts. Or the several ecumenical councils, from the Council of Nicaea (325), the 1700th anniversary of which we celebrate this year, right through to Vatican Council II (1962-65). Or the various Synods of Bishops held since Vatican II, including most recently the Synod on Synodality (2023-24). Or the five Plenary Councils of Australia, the most recent of which took place in 2021-22. Or the tradition of standing and recurrent synods in the various Oriental Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

Drawing upon this rich history, Pope Francis has stretched the concept of synodality in various ways to provoke new thinking about how we might discern and govern as a Church. He has described synodality as “an expression of the Church’s nature, form, style and mission”—the whole Church as *fratelli tutti* (all one family), “an open square where all can feel at home and participate”. It imagines a Church more aware and responsive to people’s needs and aspirations, gathered to pray and reflect

upon a common theme, while journeying together as a pilgrim people.

To engage in *synodizing*, then, is to stop, encounter the other, listen “with the ear of the heart”, discuss and discern together so as to come closer to Christ and one another. It is ecclesial living, marked “by praying and opening our eyes to everything around us; by practicing a life of fidelity to the Gospel; by seeking answers in God’s revelation” and forging a style of communion and participation directed to mission.

So, a more synodal Church, according to the Holy Father, will be one that is more welcoming and accommodating, involving diverse people and engaging them in “sincere, open and fraternal discussion”. It will be oriented not just to more talk but to active service of others. If truly guided by the Holy Spirit, it will allow us to progress without being fractured in the process.

The Fifth Plenary Council of Australia resolved that each diocese should conduct a diocesan synod within five years of that council. With an eye towards the fulfilment of this decree, a working party from the Archdiocese of Sydney recently reviewed the submissions for the Synod on Young People, for the Plenary Council, and for the Synod on Synodality, so as to better understand the hopes and challenges of the faithful in Sydney.

From these initial consultations, three particular ‘longings’ emerged:

- *That our liturgies be more prayerful, occasions of real encounter with God and opportunities to enrich our faith lives.*

This will require reflection and action bearing upon the quality of our sacramental programs, liturgical preparations, preaching, music, devotional life and more.

- *That our parishes and other Church communities be more Christ-centred,* places where all are called to ongoing conversion and living out their baptismal dignity. This will require reflection and action bearing upon the cultivation of faith, charity and holiness.
- *That our people be more mission-oriented,* carrying Christ to the world, and committing themselves to the service of all, especially the marginalised.

In response to these calls from the Church universal, national and local, having heard the Council of Priests, and in accordance with canons 460-462 of the *Code of Canon Law*, **I hereby convoke a synod of the Archdiocese of Sydney to be held from 30 April to 2 May 2026.**

The purpose of this synod will be to respond—with prayerful trust in the Holy Spirit and fidelity to Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church—to the afore-mentioned themes.

Over the coming year we will prepare for this ecclesial moment through regional gatherings in which the faithful will share their experiences and ideas in relation to the three longings outlined. In listening carefully to the different voices and through them to the Holy Spirit, we hope to arrive at some concrete proposals which might be taken forward to the Synod of Sydney in 2026 for deliberation and decision.

The regional gatherings will be supplemented by online opportunities to share your thoughts in preparation for the Synod of Sydney. I encourage you all, including

those who have not previously engaged in the consultations for the various synods, to participate wholeheartedly in this process. God calls on all of us, as members of His one Mystical Body the Church, to share our gifts with one another, to join together in the proclamation His Gospel, and so to demonstrate a Christlike love for all. By reflecting and sharing your insights, you will contribute to building up God's Church in Sydney so the message of salvation will be proclaimed and lived for many years to come.

The Church in Sydney has many strengths: a proud history, higher-than-average participation rates, committed and generous pastors and people, new members joining the Church, growing vocations, and an abundance of evangelical fruit. This is all a cause for great joy—but not for complacency. It is my hope that through the Synod of Sydney 2026, God will re-energise the Church in our region in its prayerfulness, Christlikeness, and missionary spirit.

You will receive more information over the coming months regarding our steps towards, celebration and implementation of the Synod of Sydney 2026. In the meantime, I ask that you continue to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and for the intercession of Our Lady Help of Christians, of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, and of Servant of God Eileen O'Connor, as we walk this path together.

Your father, brother and servant in Christ,



(Most Rev.) Anthony Fisher OP
Archbishop of Sydney

Feast of the Chair of Peter,
22 February 2025