The Synodal Journey in the Archdiocese of Brisbane

Sense of the Faithful

30 October 2026

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Introduction

A snapshot of the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane based on the 2021 National Census records a Catholic population of 684,423 people in a total population of 3,815,443 who live within diocesan borders. This is 17.9 per cent of the Brisbane population, which is lower than the Catholic share of the Australian population of 20 per cent in 2021. However, the large absolute size of Catholic population of the archdiocese ranks it as the second-largest Catholic diocese in Australia.

The archdiocese has over 20 active multicultural communities. The 2021 social profile shows a total of 170,485 Catholics were born overseas, a quarter of the Catholic population. The archdiocese has the largest Catholic population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (16,474) in Australia.

According to the Diocesan Summary for the Bishops Synod (2024), the archdiocese has 94 parishes across southeast Queensland. Archdiocese operates, in addition to its parishes, a range of agencies in education, early childhood care, aged care, disability services, and social support. Brisbane Catholic Education manages 146 schools across the archdiocese. BCE, according to its website, has more than 12,500 employees and almost 80,000 students.

Diocesan Summary for the Bishops Synod (2024) cited notable achievements of the archdiocese as the implementation of an ambitious Laudato Si' Action Plan. It also stated that it had made significant inroads in implementing the second iteration of the Archdiocesan Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan in relation to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

History of the diocese

The Diocese of Brisbane, dating from 1859, has had eight bishops, and from 1887, seven of whom have been archbishops. On 12 May 2012, Mark Coleridge was installed as the seventh Bishop of Brisbane and his tenure was 13 years and 123 days. On 11 September 2025, Archbishop Shane Mackinlay was installed as the eighth Bishop of Brisbane

Most previous bishops had long tenures: John Battersby (1991-2011) nearly 20 years; and Francis Rush (1973-1991) over 18 years; James Duhig (1917-1965) 48 years; Robert Dunne (1982-1917) 35 years, and James Quinn (1859-1881) 22 years.

Archbishop Coleridge's seven apostolic priorities

Archbishop Mark Coleridge set out in 2022 in the document ***With Lamps Ablaze*** even apostolic priorities for the Archdiocese of Brisbane from 2023. These seven priorities were:

1. ***Teaching Prayer***: Focusing on Christian prayer as beginning with listening to God rather than just speaking, rooted in being with Jesus
2. ***Reshaping Parish Communities***: Developing long-term pastoral planning, collaborative clergy appointments, and structural sustainability.
3. ***Bringing Cultural Communities to the Centre***: Recognizing and centering the growing spiritual energy and contributions of migrant communities from Asia, Africa, the Pacific, and Latin America.
4. ***Responding to Abuse and the Abused:*** Seeking forgiveness for historical failings, supporting survivors and their families, and fostering places of refuge and safety.
5. ***Engaging Anew with First Nations Peoples***: Walking in closer partnership, respect, and reconciliation with Indigenous communities.
6. ***Implementing Integral Ecology:*** Caring for creation and addressing social and

environmental justice issues in line with contemporary Catholic social teaching.

7. ***Embedding Synodal Governance***: Promoting shared responsibility, transparent decision-making, and active participation among both lay people and the ordained.

The Archbishop presented the priorities at Summit 2023, three-day event for a large gathering of parishioners, educators, parents, support staff, catechists, lay leaders, religious and clergy.

The launch of Brisbane archdiocese Laudato Si' Action Plan (LSAP) 2024-2026

The Laudato Si' Action Plan was developed from input from all agencies of the Brisbane archdiocese and leaders from Brisbane Catholic Education, Centacare, Archdiocesan Services, Evangelisation Brisbane and the Office of Legal, Governance and Risk.

The plan outlines seven goals for Brisbane archdiocese over the next two years: Response to the Cry of the Earth; Response to the Cry of the Poor; Ecological economics; Adoption of sustainable lifestyles; Ecological education; Ecological spirituality; and Community resilience and empowerment. The plan is for the whole archdiocese. Parishioners are encouraged to look at the plan to work out what they could do in their parishes. Under goal five, ecological education, parishes are expected to develop Laudato Si' commitments, enrol in the Laudato Si' Action Platform and receive training. It is expected 15 parishes to be recruited by 2025-2026.

The Archdiocesan Ministries Annual Report 2025, published in December, noted that 11 new parishes had signed up and were developing a LSAP in 2025. A further three parishes commenced were drafting a plan and three schools have committed to developing a plan. Coordinated Season of Creation Mass was held at St Stephen's Cathedral in 2025 with 10 parishes represented and 300 in attendance. Laudato Si' Week and Season of Creation Workshops were held with 18 parishes represented. The Archdiocesan LSAP (2024-2026) in 2025 had a particular focus in 2025 on divestment of indirect investments in fossil fuels and opportunities to further embrace renewal energy alternatives across church agencies and parishes.

Archdiocese of Brisbane Reconciliation Action Plan

> *With regards our First Nations sisters and brothers it's not enough just to listen, although that's crucial because it's where it begins. Nor is it enough just to learn, nor is it even enough just to love unless the love becomes action. So we commit ourselves to that action; the action which takes concrete shape in the reconciliation plan.* Archbishop Mark Coleridge

The Archdiocese of Brisbane Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) provides a roadmap for agencies and parishes to build respectful relationships with First Nations people. It fosters a deeper understanding of the effects of racism—both systemic and casual—and acknowledges the historical impact of colonisation on contemporary First Nations communities. The RAP identifies opportunities to create new pathways for healing and understanding through a range of activities and learning opportunities.

Of the four types of RAPs: Reflect, Innovate, Stretch, and Elevate, the Archdiocese has an Innovate RAP, which focuses on taking meaningful steps toward reconciliation. This includes building and strengthening relationships with First Nations people, engaging staff and stakeholders in reconciliation, and piloting innovative strategies that empower First Nations communities.

Archdiocesan Ministries is leading this effort in collaboration with Centacare. An Archdiocesan Services RAP Working Group has also been established to help each agency fulfil its commitments. At the parish level, the implementation of the RAP is being piloted by the

Parishes of Beenleigh, Bracken Ridge, Cleveland, Inala, Zillmere, and Stafford.

Archbishop Shane Mackinlay launched the third version of the RAP at the inaugural Archdiocesan Reconciliation Dinner on 11 September 2026. Those attending included more than 300 guests including Elders, parish members, agency representatives, external organisations and wider community from across the archdiocese.

Initial steps taken in the synodal journey: Diocesan Summary: Synod for Bishops

Leading up to the Synod of Bishops in Rome, each diocese was asked to prepare of summary of the main findings of the consultations they had undertaken. The Summary document noted that the consultation sessions 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. The focus of the consultations was on three topics: (1) A Church 'out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation'; (2) Women in the Life and Mission of the Church; and (3) Mission in the Digital Environment.

On the first topic related to multiculturalism, the two main issues that emerged were:

• *Formation in inter-cultural dialogue*. Cultural leaders, chaplains, members and the wider church need a common formation in the theology, ecclesiology and missiology of inter-cultural dialogue. Open questions put were how to lead synodally within a particular culture, how to equip lay people to lead, how to change how clericalism affects women's voices, and what common language can be used to ground inter-cultural dialogue.

• *Reconciliation Action Plan literacy*. The broader church needed to be more proactive in understanding the significance of Reconciliation Action Plans in general, and the Brisbane Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in particular. Parishioners delivering parish RAP actions are mostly aged over 50. How can parishes engage community members under the age of 50 in this important work towards reconciliation? How can clergy and laity be encouraged to take up truth-telling, on-country experiences and cultural safety training?

On the second topic of women in the life and mission of the church, the two main issues were:

• *Expanding ministries for women*. The consultations called for strategic thinking on widening the lector, acolyte and catechist ministries so women have significant leadership roles. Questions raised were:

- How can women's places at decision-making tables, such as the Episcopal Council, be formalised as policy and in practice?

- Whether lay and religious, especially female-led, funerals and weddings are possible?

- How normalise lay-led liturgies to sustain parishes?

- How to explore lay preaching more formally.

• *Preparing for a more formal role for women in the archdiocese*. The archdiocese should prepare in case the Holy See approves it, including making diaconate formation open to women and men equally. It should also consider how to use the gifts of women in the program. The archdiocese needs to better recognise and support the work of women in the Church through fair pay, maternity leave and workplace culture.

On the third topic of Mission in the Digital Environment, two main themes emerged:

• *The need to form content creators*. Creators and audiences face trolling, destructive criticism and misinformation. Questions raised: were:

- What dialogue toolkit could help creators, and what monitoring responsibility does the Church have?

- What level of catechetical formation should creators have, and should it be monitored?

- How can older people's wisdom be combined with younger generations' native digital skill?

• *Articulating Catholic teaching online*. Teaching must stay faithful to tradition while recognising that the audience is often anonymous, secular and vulnerable. Open questions included what are the creators' responsibilities if audience members are psychologically harmed, and what formation and oversight would keep content faithful, contextual and 'life-giving'.

The Synod24

The background to the Synod24: Archbishop Coleridge in his introduction to the promulgation of the action plans of the 2024 Archdiocese Synod noted that the immediate background to the Synod was the Australian Plenary Council of 2021-22. It was the Plenary Council's decisions and decrees which provided a framework for the Synod. The material from the extensive consultation before the assemblies of the Plenary Council were used in working to what the Synod would address.

The 2023-24 Synod on Synodality in Rome, the second session of which was held at the same time as the Archdiocesan Assembly was also a key element in the background.

> *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 [Synods] are complementary …(*Archbishop Coleridge 2024, p 4)

> *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* (Archbishop Coleridge 2024, p 7).

The Archdiocesan Synod process: The Archdiocesan Synod24 involved three phases: preparation, engagement, and implementation. The initial preparation phase involved consultations, especially in the parishes and regional deaneries. The engagement phase involved Synod members listening and discerning in two sessions in September and October 2024. These sessions involved a gathering of 150 people who represented the broad diversity of the archdiocese. The members included to included members of the clergy, members of religious orders, theologians, canonists, and members of the laity representing parishes, as well as archdiocesan agencies, organisations and ecclesial communities.

The key objectives of SYNOD24 process were outlined as follows:

- ***Listening and dialogue*:** to create a culture of open communication within the Church, allowing diverse perspectives to be heard and valued
- ***Unity and Collaboration***: to strengthen the bonds of unity among all members of the Church, promoting collaboration across different ministries and communities
- ***Discernment***: to engage in a prayerful reflection on the Church's mission and how best to respond to the challenges of our time
- ***Mission and Evangelisation***: to renew the Church's commitment to evangelisation, addressing contemporary issues with a spirit of hope and action
- ***Empowerment***: to empower all members of the Church to take an active role in its mission, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility.

The follow-on implementation phase is focused on the practical application of the Synod's action plans in the Archdiocese.

The promulgation of the action plans for decrees of the Plenary Council: Archbishop Coleridge made the following formal declaration of the decrees of the Plenary Council for the archdiocese:

> *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* (Archbishop Coleridge 2024, p 7).

The implementation process: The implementation of the action plans are to be delivered through eight decrees of the Plenary Council Decrees. These are reproduced in Attachment 1.

Archbishop Coleridge emphasised in his Pastoral Letter Synod24 (28 November 2024) that all 50 action plans are important, but not all are of equal weight. How priorities will be assigned will depend on the new archbishop and changes in society over the coming years.

> *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.*
>
> *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.*

Implementation of Plenary Council Decrees and SYNOD24 Action Plans

Archdiocesan Ministries Annual Report 2025 reported these activities related to the implementation of **SYNOD24.**

Two activities involved the delivery of workshops on the 'SYNOD24 Towards Implementation'. One suite for workshops was for parishes and communities with 250 participants from over 50 parishes represented. The other suite of workshops was for church agencies and organisations with 60 participants from 25 church agencies and organisations represented. There was also a Synod Symposium for Religious Orders and Schools, with six orders attending as well as along with Year 10 high school participants from five separate colleges. A Domestic and Family Violence Project was set up in response to a SYNOD24 action plan. Archdiocesan Ministries agency also organised a pastoral discussion, utilising synodal methods, on the experience of LGBTQ+ people in Catholic communities involved with archdiocesan agencies, the Archdiocesan LGBTQ+ Reference Group, parishioners and local community.

However, there has been no public reporting by the archdiocese of SNYOD24 related activities since the installation of the new archbishop on 11 September 2025.

Archbishop Coleridge's account of his legacy

Archbishop Mark, in his homily at his farewell Mass of Thanksgiving on 6 September 2025, offered an overview of his ministry in Brisbane in terms of four interrelated themes. First, he noted his role as a teacher and preacher. Second, he acknowledged his role as a leader in introducing synodality to the church in Australia and to the archdiocese.

> *Stirred by Pope Francis' call to synodality, I was involved in leading the Church in Australia to and through the Plenary Council, which has had its influence on the global Synod on Synodality. Beyond the Plenary Council, I also convened an Archdiocesan Synod which had to decide how to implement the decrees of the Plenary Council at the local level. The Synod produced fifty Action Plans, which are the gift of the Spirit and a charter for the future that lies before us.*

The third change he cited was to move to centre stage in the life and mission of the archdiocese cultural communities coming from places like Vietnam, the Philippines, Latin America, India and Africa. This included a new engagement of the Church with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The fourth change Archbishop Mark identified was to offer hospitality to members of the archdiocese, leaders of other Churches, Jewish and Muslim leaders, and to political leaders. The purpose of these meetings and related initiatives was to build relationships, based on the understanding that 'we need to work together for the common good'.

He concluded by noting that 'there is so much unfinished business; there are so many loose ends. But if you waited to finish all the business or tie up all the loose ends, you'd be waiting forever'.

Archbishop Shane Mackinlay's intentions and his initial changes

Archbishop Mackinlay in the homily at his Installation Mass on 11 September 2025 stated that he was committed to continuing what predecessor had started:

> *I am honoured to be following after him, and enormously grateful for the initiatives and undertakings that he has fostered here, which I look forward to taking up and carrying forward.*

Specifically, he referred to the first of the commitments made by last year's Archdiocese Synod

is "to develop and implement a … plan that provides opportunities … to come to a deeper recognition, appreciation and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures and spiritualities."

Archbishop Shane also emphasised the importance of continuing the synodal journey:

> *Pope Francis, and now Pope Leo, are asking us to do this by becoming more synodal: discerning together where the Holy Spirit is leading us, and how we might build up structures of collaboration and involvement that enhance our capacity to live out Jesus' mission.*
>
> *Here in Brisbane, the response to that invitation has taken a very concrete form, in the fifty action plans that were developed by last year's Archdiocese Synod as ways of implementing the decrees of the Australian Plenary Council, drawing on the insights of the Synod for a Synodal Church. They are very concrete ways of strengthening our faith, our connection to one another, and our capacity to engage in the shared action that is needed to build hope and possibility in our world.*

Archbishop Shane commented on the changes he was part of in the six years he spent as bishop of the Diocese of Sandhurst. He noted 'the great commitment and momentum supporting the various projects that are underway there' and stated that he would 'bring all that I have learnt and experienced in Sandhurst to my ministry here'.

New Council of Vicars and other changes

Twelve months after his installation, Archbishop Shane Mackinlay announced in *Working together in the mission of the Gospel* that a 'renewed leadership model' would be set up for the archdiocese. He said the new model would 'strengthen relationships among Catholic organisations and elevate our combined capacity to serve the mission of the Church and respond to the needs of our communities'. The new collaborative leadership model was designed in consultation with leaders across the archdiocese's network of organisations.

Archbishop Mackinlay outlined three main objectives for the new structure:

- Encouraging a broader involvement in guiding the mission of the archdiocese;
- Fostering collaboration between archdiocesan parishes, agencies and other Catholic bodies in the archdiocese; and
- Creating a group to guide and monitor the implementing of the Synod24 decisions.

Three changes were made. First, the major change is the creation of a Council of Vicars. This will include the vicar general and seven new vicars who will each focus on a particular area of mission. These are health, social services, education, pastoral mission, clergy, religious and administration. Their roles are to coordinate and encourage information sharing, advocacy and stewardship across Catholic agencies in their respective fields. The positions for each portfolio will be part-time, and appointments initially will be for an 18-month period.

Five of the portfolios, health, social services, education, pastoral mission and administration would be open to laypeople. The Vicar General and Vicar for Clergy will continue to be filled by priests, and the Vicar for Religious will be member of a religious institute,

The second change is the creation of a chief of staff position to co-ordinate the archbishop's office and the work of these seven key portfolios in the administration of the archdiocese. The third change is the intention to establish an ongoing Archdiocesan Pastoral Mission Council to assist the archbishop after the new Council of Vicars has been set up. It is the archbishop's intention that the 'Council will use the goals and mission priorities discerned by the 2024

Archdiocesan Synod, and future Synods, to help parishes and agencies plan how to put them into practice in their own communities'.

Changes in parishes

Archbishop Coleridge's Epistolic priorities for the Archdiocese of Brisbane from 2023 *With Lamps Ablaze* had as its second priority Reshaping Parish Communities. This was promoted as a strategic effort to move local parishes away from outdated administrative burdens and redirect them toward active, missionary outreach. Rather than implementing short-term fixes, parishes were encouraged to engage in structural, decade-long planning.

Managed primarily through the Evangelisation Brisbane Strategic Plan, the Archdiocese equipped parish priests and their lay leadership teams with targeted formation tools. Implementation strategies included specialised workshops. These involved providing local leadership teams and parish priests with the skills to handle community structural changes. Training for lay leaders included enrolling 80 new participants annually into dedicated archdiocesan leadership formation programs which focused on lay-led ministries.

The archdiocese has been encouraging parishes to connect with a "community of communities." This means restructuring the physical and financial resources of a parish to act as a launchpad for localised outreach such as connecting with Emmanuel City Mission in South Brisbane is a daytime sanctuary for the homeless and the vulnerable. An example of a dedicated faith community is the Veterans' Care Association founded by former army officer Deacon Gary Stone and his son retired Major Michael Stone. The association conducts a peer-to-peer well-being program comprising holistic health education, group therapy, mentoring, physical activity, commemoration and community development. These programs have been running for 12 years up to 2026 and have directly assisted more than 1000 veterans' families.

Archdiocesan Ministries a three-year strategic plan 2025-27 with measurable outputs. Also available is a 2025 progress report on the strategic plan, with information on the range of activities undertaken. The Archdiocesan Ministries website, under parish leadership, offer a 10-week parish leadership course for both clergy and laity to explore contemporary leadership practices integrated with scripture and the examples from the gospels. The website also refers to the help provided to parishes to develop strategic plans and includes links to 12 parish strategic plans plus a detailed plan for the Emmanuel Community.

Broader governance reforms are being undertaken under the leadership of Archbishop Shane Mackinlay through a renewed archdiocesan model which includes a new Council of Vicars and a Diocesan Pastoral Council.

Parishes changes recommended by SYNOD24

The SYNOD24 recommendations called on the Archdiocese to strengthen inclusion, participation and shared responsibility across parish life. These included providing safe, facilitated opportunities for people who are marginalised or disenfranchised to share their experiences, and helping families feel welcome and involved in parish communities before and after the sacraments of initiation.

The recommendations for action proposed greater support for lay ministry, including lay-led liturgies where clergy are not regularly available. They also proposed clearer arrangements and training for lay people to preside at funerals, baptisms and, in specified circumstances, weddings. Lay people should also have more opportunities to preach or offer reflections, with appropriate formation and support. Parishes and deaneries are encouraged to provide formation by experts on topics including prayer, Scripture, the sacraments, family life, mission, care for creation and inclusion. It was proposed also that lay people should contribute to clergy and

seminarian formation, including through accompaniment and structured feedback on homilies.

The Archdiocese was urged to develop a mission-focused, synodal and co-responsible roadmap, making regular conversations in the Spirit part of planning, decision-making, pastoral care and community-building. Parishes, communities and agencies should use the method of discernment to implement the SYNOD24 Action Plans. A deanery-level project should identify, and mentor lay people from diverse backgrounds for service on parish and Archdiocesan councils and committees.

Further recommendations include the need to consult parish members during pastor handovers, especially asking the Parish Pastoral Council to provide a statement of what the parish expects of a pastor. Also recommended was the conduct of regular pastor reviews with ongoing professional supervision. It was also suggested that parishes, communities and agencies should work together to share information and coordinate on ecological initiatives. As well, archdiocesan guidance was requested for integrating care for our common home into parish liturgical celebrations.

Assessment

The Archdiocese of Brisbane has an impressive record of change in terms of its diocesan led initiatives. However, in the absence of an archdiocese annual report, it is not clear how much change is taking place at the parish level. For example, information on the number of parishes is lacking, as well as the number of Mass attenders by parish and whether parish mergers are taking place or planned. Also, it is important to know is how many parishes have pastoral councils and what changes in terms of their operating modes are taking place at this level.

Establishing a closer link between the bishop, the parish priest and the parish lay leaders

The big question is to what extent are the parish priests leading or at least supporting the changes. What is missing is a public reporting link between the episcopal leadership, parish priests and the parish lay leaders. The canonical mechanism for this link is the obligatory Bishop's parish visitation (Canon 396 §1). Each year the archbishop (or his delegates auxiliary bishops and episcopal vicars) is required to undertake episcopal visitations to a number of parishes and migrant communities within their diocese so that he has visited all parishes in diocese within five years.

According to the Vatican's Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops 'Apostolorum Successores', the purpose of the parish visitation is to 'evaluate the effectiveness of the structures and agencies designed for pastoral service'. The bishop or his delegate is 'to determine more accurately the priorities and the means required for overall pastoral provision after taking account of the circumstances and difficulties involved. As Para 220 on The Nature of the Pastoral Visit states:

> *The pastoral visit is one of the ways, confirmed by centuries of experience, through which the bishop maintains personal contact with the clergy and with other members of the People of God. It is an occasion to rejuvenate the energies of those engaged in evangelisation, to praise, encourage and reassure them. It is also an opportunity to invite the faithful to a renewal of Christian life and to an ever more intense apostolic activity.*
>
> *The pastoral visit helps the bishop to evaluate the effectiveness of the structures and agencies designed for pastoral service, taking account of the circumstances and difficulties of the task of evangelisation, so as to determine more accurately the priorities and the means required for overall pastoral provision.*

The Directory advises that the pastoral visit should be organised well in advance. It also advises that 'the faithful should receive suitable preparation through a special series of talks and sermons on themes concerning the nature of the Church, hierarchical communion, and the episcopate'. The Directory states that the bishop should also make suitable preparation for the visit by informing himself in advance of the socio-religious situation of the parish. Such information could prove useful to him and to the relevant diocesan offices in forming a true picture of the state of the parish community and in making appropriate provision.

The directory concludes by recommending that after each parish visit, the bishop prepare a record of the visit in the form of a letter to the parish. This should express appreciation for the parish's pastoral activities and offer recommendations for improvements in the life of the parish. These may refer to the state of divine worship, to pastoral work and any other important initiatives.

The model for formalising the bishop's parish visitation has been developed in the Diocese of Sandhurst during Archbishop Shane Mackinlay's tenure as bishop. The Sandhurst model has also been adopted recently adopted by the Diocese of Cairns, under its new Bishop Joseph Caddy.

Conclusion

The archdiocese under the direction of Archbishop Coleridge took the lead in making changes in the spirit of Pope Francis. These included the first Laudato Si Action Plan in an Australian Diocese, and the Archdiocese of Brisbane Reconciliation Action Plan. Archbishop Coleridge also produced his list of apostolic priorities and directed the resources of the archdiocese to focus on them. He was the first bishop to call an archdiocesan synod in September-October 2024 to develop follow on actions from the Plenary Council declarations which resulted in a list of 50 recommended changes.

These foundations have been accepted and supported by the new archbishop. Based on Archbishop Shane Mackinlay's own track record of significant changes in his former diocese, there is every likelihood that the Brisbane Archdiocese will remain at the forefront of the changes in the Australian Church promoted by Pope Francis and Pope Leo.

Attachment 1: The Archdiocese of Brisbane Synod 2024: Promulgation of the Action Plans[1]

Plenary Council Decree 1: Healing Wounds, Receiving Gifts[2]

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.

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[1] The introduction by Archbishop Coleridge notes that 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.

[2] Emphasis in the action plans in the original text.

** 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.***

Closing remarks by Archbishop Coleridge (November 2024)

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.