2026 Adelaide Archdiocesan Synod: Method and Outcomes

Sense of the Faithful Ltd

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1. Introduction

Objective

The purpose of the 2026 Archdiocesan Synod was to provide 'assistance to the Archbishop in his ministry and leadership for the good of the whole Archdiocesan community'. The requirement for a Diocesan Synod arose from a decree of the Plenary Council that every diocese hold a synod within five years of the Council's conclusion.

> *The Diocesan Synod gives [us] an opportunity to further reflection on our journey so far through the Diocesan Assemblies, Regional Assemblies, Plenary Council and the Global Synod. Most importantly it helps us pave the way forward through concrete proposal and actions.*

Selection process

An Archdiocesan selection committee, comprising members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, worked with individual regions to select synod members. In total, 60 lay delegates were chosen. The Synod also included 30 members of the clergy.

The lay members were selected from across the Archdiocese to represent the people of God in a way that 'truly reflects the entire portion of the people of God which constitutes the Diocese, taking account of the different regions of the diocese, of social conditions and professions, and of the part played in the apostolate by the members, whether individually or in association with others' (Can. §512.2).

Lay delegates are women and men, including members of religious congregations and institutes, who are not ordained clergy. Those interested in becoming lay members of the Synod were asked to complete an expression of interest application.

What participation involved

Synod members were required to attend a preparation gathering and both sessions of the Diocesan Synod (29, 30 May; 27 June 2026). Members were expected to take part in all three sessions. The Archdiocese made funds available to support synod members with travel, accommodation and child minding support if needed.

Lay synod members were also required to:

- participate, where possible, in the formation process supporting the preparation for the Diocesan Synod;
- Engage in dialogue and consult with parishes, schools and communities in your designated region;
- look at the bigger picture, not take a personal standpoint, for the whole of the people of God in the Archdiocese; and
- commit to the implementation phase following the Synod.

Lay synod participants were asked to undertake mandatory training and formation before the Synod. This included an introduction to the Synod documents and processes; online learning and formation materials on synodality and the key themes; practice using the discernment models to be used at the Synod; and information about the voting process.

The faithful of the Archdiocese of Adelaide were also be invited to prepare for the Synod through a formation and education process. A variety a formation resources were made

available in parishes, schools and communities.

The outcomes

The final decree and five declarations of the Archdiocesan Synod were signed by Archbishop O'Regan on 20 August 2026. The Archbishop stated that

> *every parish and pastoral arena should receive these five Declarations not as instructions issued from a distance, but as our own shared discernment returning home. They should be studied, prayed with and enacted locally according to the needs and gifts of each community.*

Introducing the Final Document of the 2026 Archdiocesan Synod. Archbishop O'Regan noted that it was the result of many years of consultation and discernment. These consultations included three Diocesan Assemblies (2021, 2022, and 2024) which coincided with the Fifth Australian Plenary Council and the Synod on Synodality. In June 2025, five writing groups prepared papers exploring the key themes to be discussed and discerned at our Synod. These papers became the the Synod's Working Document.

In February 2026, the Working Document was shared across the Archdiocese for consultation. Dialogue Week, held from 22 to 28 February 2026, gave people in parishes, schools, communities and diocesan agencies an opportunity to reflect on the document, engage in dialogue using the method of Conversations in the Spirit. Their feedback was provided to the Synod members to inform the Synod deliberations.

The Synod emphasised communal discernment, that is discernment experienced with others, through mutual listening, shared prayer and reflecting together on the Word of God.

> *"In the synodal Church "the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions" (ITC 68) for mission. The way to promote a synodal Church is to foster as great a participation of all the People of God as possible in decision-making processes." (FD, 87)*

During the Synod Sessions in May and June 2026, members reflected prayerfully on the Working Document and the feedback from Dialogue Week as they discerned together God's plan for the Archdiocese in the coming years. This process resulted in 30 recommendations for consideration by the Archdiocese. These recommendations will inform the pastoral activity at every level in the Archdiocese of Adelaide.

The Synod Final Document has been accompanied by official decrees and an implementation strategy. In the coming months and years, additional resources and support mechanisms will be provided to assist with its implementation and evaluation. Each area for development identified in 'A Synodal Church on Mission', will incorporate a statement on accountability within its recommendations. This is directly linked to the post-synodal implementations (see para 122)

2. The key issues identified for action from the document

The 2026 Archdiocese Synod Final Document, 'A Synodal Church on Mission', identifies key issues for action across five main themes, as well as post-synod implementation priorities. Each key theme includes an introduction, an account of current realities, a theological reflexion, recommendations, and considerations for implementation. The following is an AI-generated summary of the recommendations. The full text is available to read in detail here.

Key theme 1: Becoming Missionary Disciples

* Develop clear, plain-language explanations of mission and provide lifelong formation, including Scripture, prayer, and Catholic Social Teaching, to build confidence in sharing the faith.

* Strengthen deep listening, structured ongoing conversations, and safe spaces for marginalised groups and voices that are often missing, including First Nations communities, young people, and people on the peripheries.

* Advance partnerships, inclusion, and advocacy. This includes adopting NATSICC's cultural competency training, endorsing Welcome to Country guidelines, implementing local and archdiocesan 'Laudato Si' Action Plans', and developing a Disability Inclusion Plan.

* Strengthen ecumenical and interfaith collaboration on social justice, peace, care for creation, and community wellbeing.

* Supporting family life as the Domestic Church, youth leadership, and new digital forms of communication to be visible bearers of the Good News.

Key theme 2: Communion in Grace - Sacrament to the World

* Foster welcoming, inclusive, and accessible parishes that cultivate a sense of belonging for families, children, and people of all backgrounds and life circumstances.

* Promote a rich liturgical and prayer life, with diverse expressions, high-quality preaching, and ongoing formation for liturgy committees and ministers.

* Strengthen shared, co-responsible liturgical and sacramental leadership between ordained and lay people.

* Develop consistent, unified pathways for sacramental and faith formation across the home, school, and parish.

Key theme 3: The Mission of Catholic Education and Being Church Together

* Deepen meaningful dialogue and shared mission between parishes, schools, and families through joint exploration of 'Being Church Together' and regular leadership dialogue groups.

* Prioritise well-resourced formation and mentoring for school leaders, APRIMs, and Religious Education teachers to support the integration of Catholic identity and mission.

* Support continuous, lifelong formation pathways from Reception to Year 12, student leadership, peer witness, chaplaincy for tertiary students, and connections with alumni.

Key theme 4: Formation for Mission and Leadership

* Implement a comprehensive Archdiocesan formation strategy with diverse, multi-modal programmes that are co-designed locally and aligned with the statement 'Drawn into the Joy of the Gospel'.

* Develop a comprehensive People and Culture Plan to support lay ecclesial ministry, appropriate remuneration, performance review, wellbeing support, and pastoral supervision.

* Advance leadership as service—emphasizing women's leadership, inclusion of under-represented groups, and collaborative synodal decision-making.

* Fund and support an Archdiocesan Formation Team and embed synodal methods such as prayer, listening, discernment, and dialogue into all formation programmes.

Key theme 5: Structures and Planning for Communion, Participation and Mission

* Appoint a Diocesan and Parish Structures Group to review governance, mandate Diocesan and Parish Pastoral Councils as best practice, and foster subsidiarity.

* Strengthen regional and cluster-based planning, resource-sharing, and integration between parishes and schools to reduce administrative burdens and support local mission.

* Ensure that administrative, compliance, safeguarding, and digital and AI systems effectively support mission and provide practical helpdesks for parishes.

* Enhance support for volunteers, leadership succession planning, and formal transition and induction programmes for clergy.

* Establish formal appraisal, review, and pastoral supervision processes for all diocesan and parish leaders.

3. Post-Synod Implementation and Accountability

* Establish a Synod Implementation Working Group, comprising members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council and Bishop's Council of Priests, in August 2026 to turn outcomes into resourced, staged actions with clear timelines.

The group will:

a. Review the Synod outcomes and identify the actions required for each Key Theme.

b. Assign each action to the appropriate person, parish, school, office, agency, council, commission or diocesan body.

c. Identify which recommendations require Archdiocesan action, parish action, school action, agency action, regional action or shared responsibility.

d. Determine what resources, formation, templates, funding, communication and training are needed.

e. Develop a staged implementation plan with clear priorities, responsibilities and timelines.

f. Ensure that parish, school and community action plans can be adapted to local circumstances while remaining aligned with the Archdiocesan mission.

g. Provide practical tools to help parishes, schools and communities discern local goals and actions.

h. Develop an evaluation and accountability process, to be put into place by July 2027, including regular reporting to the Archbishop, Diocesan Pastoral Council, Bishop’s Council of Priests, parishes, schools and communities.

i. Ensure that implementation is communicated in plain language and through accessible multimedia formats.

j. Review progress regularly so that the Synod becomes an ongoing process of conversion, participation and mission, rather than a one-off event.

The Archdiocese will provide a practical implementation framework to assist parishes, schools, communities, and agencies to develop local missionary action plans, identify responsible leaders, allocate resources, support formation, and review progress regularly in light of the Synod outcomes. The following points apply to the implementation and

resourcing of all recommendations in this section of the document.

- Identify the needs in your local community, including the needs of people who are marginalised?
- Who is involved in implementing the recommendations?
- How will the necessary resources be provided within our communities?
- What will the implementation process look like - for example, will action plans be developed?

Post synod implementation meeting

The Synod Implementation Gathering was held on the evening of Wednesday, 21 October 2026. Titled "How shall we live the Synod?", the event was organised to assist the newly established Synod Implementation Working Group to decide the most effective strategies to action the outcomes, decrees, and declarations of the 2026 Adelaide Archdiocesan Synod. The meeting focused on starting with the Synod's 255 recommendations based on the five core themes. The meeting reduced them to some 130 practical, resourced, and accountable actions across local parishes, pastoral sectors, and diocesan agencies. Further updates and timelines regarding the implementation can be tracked through the official Together on the Way Portal.

4. An Assessment of the process

The key ingredients of a successful synod

Key participants identified the following elements of the successful synod. These elements are based on an analysis by AI agent Claude. The source for the analysis is the responses made by four members of the preparatory commission to three questions posed by Southern Cross journalist Richard Evans in the article 'Other sides of the synod' (see Attachment 1). The six key elements identified are: broad preparation, the members' retreat and prayer, conversations in the Spirit, revising the document, consensus, then implementation.

1. A 12-month preparatory commission: A 12-member group met every few weeks over the year before the Synod. It was chaired by Vicar General Fr Dean Marin and included clergy, senior lay people and Archdiocese staff. None of them had run a Synod before, so they worked it out as they went. They built on earlier experience: Diocesan Assemblies, the Plenary Council, the Synod on Synodality in Rome, and research done by senior leaders in the Archdiocesan Office.

2. A goal of broad engagement before the sessions: The commission set out to involve as many people as possible across the archdiocese so that people would feel ownership of the Synod. Monica Conway saw these preparatory activities as "the key" to respectful dialogue and consensus during the sessions.

3. Dialogue Week: This idea came out of the commission's discussions. Teams, parishes and communities across the archdiocese carried it out, and what came out of it went into the working document.

4. A retreat for members. Two respondents named the first members' retreat as a turning point. One specifically credited the work of the moderator. The retreat set a tone of praying together and listening to the Spirit.

5. Conversation in the Spirit: The first session used this method of prayerful, patient listening. One respondent called it "depolarised dialoguing" rather than people shouting over

each other. Members saw it as communal discernment, not just a way to reach decisions.

6. A working document revised over time. The draft drew on the Dialogue Week outcomes. It was then revised using feedback from the first plenary session, and that revision was what made consensus possible at the second session.

7. Two plenary sessions that reached consensus*:* The members agreed overwhelmingly to all the recommendations, and members felt their voices were heard in the final document. Disagreements, such as on women's ordination and celibacy, were acknowledged and discussed respectfully rather than shut down.

8. Handover and ongoing work: The working document was presented to Archbishop Patrick O'Regan. Members described the sessions as the start of an ongoing process of discernment and implementation, not the end of one. One respondent noted that the open question now is how to turn it into practical, concrete action.

Use of the Conversation in the Spirit methodology

Of particular importance in the synodal process is the use of Conversation in the Spirit. A description of the method used the Adelaide Archdiocese Synod was given in a Southern Cross article by Richard Evans titled 'seamless first session of the Archdiocese of Adelaide Synod' (31 May 2026). The major components are outlined below, based on an analysis by Claude, using the Southern Cross article as the only source. Attachment 2 provides a Claude generated description of the Conversations in the spirit methodology used in the second session of the Synod in Rome.

The setup

- About 100 synod members sat at 12 tables. Each table mixed lay people and clergy.
- The day was split into three sessions, each on one theme. Every table did "Becoming Missionary Disciples." The room then split in half to cover the other themes: sacramental life, Catholic education, formation for mission and leadership, and structures for participation.
- Each table was given an overview of its theme, feedback from the wider consultations (including Dialogue Week), and specific draft recommendations to respond to.
- Prayer and song opened the day.

The rounds at each table

***Personal sharing*:** each person had two minutes to say what they saw as essential to the theme and why. A countdown clock was on screen and people were stopped when it reached zero, this was done so that nobody could dominate.

***Reporting back what others said*:** each person then had one minute to relay what another member at the table had said. This round was about showing you had listened, not adding your own argument.

***Moving toward consensus*:** a 15-minute open discussion aimed at "a consensus of sorts" on the recommendations.

Silence: Between the rounds there was a period of 15 minutes silence.

***Outcome*:** Intended or otherwise, the nature of the formula proved a natural ice breaker and the ensuing two themes – one held in each of the day's three sessions – went by without hitches of any sort.

Attachment 1: Feedback from Synod members on the process

The following comments from Synod members come from an article in the Southern Cross dated 31st July 2026. The article by Richard Evans is entitled 'Other sides of the synod'.

In the 12 months leading up to the two plenary sessions of the 2026 Archdiocese of Adelaide Synod, a 12 member preparatory commission gathered every few weeks to discuss and shape the direction of the inaugural event. The commission, chaired by Vicar General Fr Dean Marin, was made up of members of the clergy, several experienced and senior lay people and some employees at the Archdiocese.

What struck me was how attitudes towards the Synod – what it meant, why we were holding it and its potential – changed over the past year. It is a personal reflection only but the vision of the Synod as an ongoing, living and ever-changing entity is enduring. The two Synod sessions which led to the working document being presented to Archbishop Patrick O'Regan, are merely the start of much hard work that will come with its implementation. Once the sessions were done, four members of the preparatory commission were asked just what they thought about the 2026 Synod.

1. Have your thoughts on what the Synod means changed over the last 12 months? If so, how?

James Ellery (senior lay worker): I have come to see the Synod less as a process for reaching decisions and more as a way of being Church. A spiritual exercise in learning how to communally listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. To do so requires not shouting over each other as in secular forums but depolarised dialoguing to discern the sensus fidei.

Andrea Bassan (senior lay worker): At first, I saw the Synod as a way to encourage and guide change or reform, leading to clear action plans. Over time, I have come to understand how diverse Catholics in Adelaide and around the world are in culture, education and upbringing. Through conversations with members of the preparatory commission and the Synod, I have gained a deeper appreciation of the faith, friendship and cooperation within the community. Even where we disagree on some of my hopes, such as inviting women to the priesthood and making priestly celibacy voluntary, I have experienced a caring and tolerant environment where different views are welcomed and thoughtfully considered.

Monica Conway (Chair Diocesan Pastoral Council): When the Preparatory Commission first met last year, we quickly acknowledged that no one around the table had organised a Synod before and we would all need to learn and grow toward the 2026 Synod. We were, however, standing on the strong foundations of Diocesan Assemblies, the Plenary Council and the Synod on Synodality in Rome as well as the research and knowledge of senior leaders in the Archdiocesan Office. These strong foundations quickly allowed us to move from 'What do we have to do?" to "What could we do?" which encouraged us to explore big ideas alongside practical planning issues. Big ideas like Dialogue Week and others emerged from discussion around the table and were successfully executed by teams, parishes and communities across the archdiocese.

Fr Mark Sexton: My awareness of the way the Synod works is far clearer than when we began. My first thoughts were a fear that it sounded a bit 'woolly'. This was soon dissipated as we worked through the retreat and the first session. As someone said, we have to work through the Synodal way in order to understand it.

2. Was there one particular moment of change? What spurred it?

James Ellery: A strong moment of surprise/revelation came when we had overwhelming agreement to all the recommendations. I expected more dissent. I realised that genuine consensus emerged not because everyone agreed from the beginning, but because patient listening gradually transformed how we understood one another particularly in the first session through the conversations in the spirit. By the end everyone felt their voice was heard in the final document. That experience made me trust the process of communal discernment more deeply.

Andrea Bassan: My understanding of the Synod has changed gradually, with the first members' retreat leaving a particularly strong impression on me. I came to appreciate more deeply the faith that unites us, and to see that listening to the Spirit in prayer is far from an empty exercise. It has opened my mind and heart to the spirituality, experiences and perspectives of others. It has shaped my daily behaviour by encouraging me to consider decisions from different perspectives and reflect much more on how they may affect others.

Monica Conway: The Commission soon developed a key goal to involve as many people as possible in the lead up to the Synod to maximise engagement and ownership across the archdiocese. From this goal came innovative thinking and ideas. We realised that we weren't just planning for an event but that we needed to ensure that the Synod processes would lead to genuine renewal and positive change in our local Church.

Fr Mark Sexton: It was very much the experience of the retreat and Br Ian Orm's moderation that did this for me.

3. Is there anything surprising that you have learned about the nature of a Synod in the last 12 months?

James Ellery: You should never try to predict a Synod's path before it occurs. For example, I certainly didn't expect so many recommendations or the wide variety of subsection proposals. A Synod does not ask us to abandon differences but to hold them prayerfully together while seeking God's will. Its strength lies not in producing simple answers, but in forming a community capable of walking faithfully together in communion, participation, and mission.

Andrea Bassan: As I noted above, I first understood the Synod as an event that would produce clear action plans. I now see it as part of an ongoing process of reflection and discernment about the future direction of the Archdiocese of Adelaide. It has also prompted me to consider how we can help build a better world for all, especially those who feel forgotten or abandoned in an overly commercialised society that values what people have more than who they are.

Monica Conway: Not I learned that the preparatory activities with Synod members and the wider archdiocese were the key to conducting the Synod sessions in ways that led to respectful dialogue and consensus about the recommendations. Making sure the outcomes from dialogue week were integrated into the working document and that feedback from the first session was used to revise the document, led to overall consensus at the second session. I think Synod members walked away feeling heard and excited about the fruits of the process and the renewal to come from the next part of the journey.

Fr Mark Sexton: Not sure if it is a surprise, but the process is far more concrete than I feared. I was always hopeful of the potential, but, as I heard a number of people say, how do we move on the practical and concrete?

Attachment 2: Conversation in the Spirit method used Synod on Synodality in Rome

Before the conversation

- ***Personal preparation*.** Each participant reads the material, prays, and reflects on what they want to contribute. They come with something to share, not a position to defend.
- ***Small groups*.** Groups have about 10–12 people.
- ***A facilitator*.** The facilitator keeps the process on track: timing, turn-taking and transitions between stages. They do not "enter into the contents." A secretary or rapporteur records what emerges.
- ***Opening in prayer.*** The meeting usually begins with prayer, silence and often a reading from Scripture. This sets the frame of listening to the Holy Spirit rather than debating.

The three rounds

***Taking the floor*.** Each person speaks in turn for a set time, usually about three minutes, from their own prayer and experience. Nobody interrupts, responds or debates. The others simply listen.

***Making space for others*.** After silence, each person shares what struck them most in what others said: what resonated, what surprised or challenged them, and where they sensed the Spirit at work. The focus moves from one's own view to the group's. A guiding question is "when listening, did my heart burn within me?"

***Building together*.** After further silence, the group talks more freely to identify what has emerged. This includes points of agreement and also differences, obstacles and new questions. The aim is for everyone to feel their contribution is represented in the outcome, and for "prophetic voices" to be heard rather than flattened. Agreement is not forced.

Closing and output

- The conversation ends with a prayer of thanksgiving.
- The group agrees a short report of what emerged. In the 2024 assembly, members approved it on whether it fairly "represents the work done together," not point by point, and divergences were recorded alongside agreements.

The role of silence

Silence is built into the method, not added at the edges. It normally comes at the opening, between round 1 and round 2, between round 2 and round 3, and often before the close. Its purposes are:

- ***Taking in what was heard*.** It stops people from jumping straight to reply, argue or prepare their next point, so what others said is properly received.
- ***Noticing inner movements*.** Following the Ignatian tradition, participants attend to what stirs in them, such as consolation, resistance, or a sense of being drawn or unsettled. That noticing feeds round 2.
- ***Shifting attention from "my view" to the Spirit*.** Silence marks the conversation as prayer rather than negotiation. The question becomes what God might be saying through the group, not who wins.
- ***Lowering polarisation*.** Pausing slows the pace and cools reactions. This is what James Ellery meant by "depolarised dialoguing."
- ***Creating equality*.** Everyone has the same time to speak and the same silence afterwards, so confident or senior voices don't dominate.

Source: XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS SECOND SESSION 2-27 October 2024 How we will work together (methodology)