

Case study of the Adelaide Archdiocese becoming a synodal Church

Summary

The purpose of the Sense of the Faithful case studies is to encourage the Australian Church in its adoption of a synodal path. We want to do this by helping dioceses deepen further their understanding of what a synodal approach involves. The focus of the case studies is on identifying the key features of a diocese promoting these changes and the factors supporting or hindering their further adoption.

Synodal practices at the diocesan level in Adelaide have become well established. The important synodal steps taken have included the conduct of four diocesan assemblies and seven regional assemblies, the reconstituting of the diocesan pastoral council (DPC) and preparations for a diocesan synod in 2026. The DPC is developing a new leadership framework to apply to both clerical and lay leaders.

However, much of the action has taken place at the diocesan level with fledging efforts to promote synodality at the parish level. Parish pastoral councils (PPCs) are now operating in all but two of the 56 parishes. The Diocesan Office has published a 2024 Handbook for PPCs which has a strong emphasis on what steps should be taken to apply synodal practices. The Parish Priest and Chair of the PPC in some 40 parishes now participate in regular meetings on issues related to adopting synodal practices. It is not clear, however, what changes in parishes are actually taking place.

The Sense of the Faithful assessment of the synodal changes shows that significant challenges still need to be tackled at the parish level. Public information needs to be made available to all parishes on new activities undertaken by parishes such as developing and implementing Laudato Si Action Plans. The participants in the 2024 Diocesan Assembly identified changes that could be made to how parishes are governed and how they relate to the communities within which they are located. Feedback on whether these recommendations have been acted on in specific parishes would greatly extend an awareness of what can and should be done to become more synodal.

The case study concluded by noting the harmful effect of generational change on parish participation and the possible reasons for it were noted. Understanding the nature of these obstacles will require survey data and focus group discussions. One such group could be the parents of children in Catholic schools with little or no contact with the parish. Responding to the issues they identify will not be easy but necessary.