



Catholic Archdiocese of  
Canberra and Goulburn



Catholic Diocese of the  
Australian Military Services

# Canberra and Goulburn Archdiocese

(Incorporating the Catholic Military Ordinariate of Australia)

## Synthesis Report for the Synod

### 2021-2023

*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*

*This Synthesis is prepared and presented on the land of the traditional custodians, the Ngunnawal people. We acknowledge and pay our respects to all First Peoples, traditional custodians of all the lands and waterways of our Archdiocese. We thank them for their continued hospitality.*

*We acknowledge and celebrate the continuation of a living culture that has a unique role in this region. We also acknowledge Elders past and present as well as our emerging leaders of tomorrow and thank them for their wisdom and guidance as we walk in their footsteps.*



## Introduction

In March 2020, Pope Francis announced that the theme for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023 would be “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”.

The journey towards the celebration of the Synod opened in October 2021 in dioceses around the world and Pope Francis invited the entire Church to reflect on this theme that is decisive for its life and mission. Our Archdiocese (Canberra and Goulburn – CG), along with the Catholic Military Ordinariate of Australia (CMOA) joined the universal Church in participating in the diocesan consultation process to promote a sense of communion and journeying together. Our Archbishop, Archbishop Christopher Prowse is currently also the Apostolic Administrator for the CMOA.

## Australian Diocesan Consultation Phase (October 2021-April 2022)

The fundamental question that guided the consultation of the People of God was: A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together:” How is this “journeying together” happening today in our particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?

This synthesis is the result of the reflections that were undertaken by various individuals and groups within the Archdiocese and the CMOA. These reflections then helped form the submissions that result in this synthesis report which will be presented to the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference by Archbishop Prowse.

## Our Particular Church –

### The Archdiocese of the Canberra and Goulburn

The Archdiocese is approximately 88,000 square kilometres reaching from the western plains of New South Wales to the southern coast and border of Victoria. We encompass the high country and the Snowy Mountains, large and smaller rural communities and in the centre is Canberra, the capital city of Australia. Being the political and bureaucratic heartland of our nation, Canberra is a modern city, noted as “the bush capital” whose residents are well educated, come from all corners of the world, possess many faith traditions and for the main part enjoy a high standard of living. There are approximately 163,000 ‘registered’ Catholics in the Archdiocese.

Canberra and the Archdiocese are not immune from the tensions of modern life. Reconciliation and a just accompaniment with the traditional custodians of the many Aboriginal lands we share, the impact of climate change on our mainly rural communities, unemployment, homelessness, the impact of drugs and alcohol, the lack of affordable housing, cost of living pressures, political tensions, and an increasing move to secularisation from an historically, mainly European Christian heritage, are some of the issues with which our particular Church wrestles.

## Our Particular Church – The CMOA

Our Military diocese is responsible for the spiritual and pastoral welfare of Catholic serving and ex-serving members and their families attached to the Australian Defence Force within Australia, its territories and also its overseas responsibilities as tasked by the Australian Government. Serving members comprise the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), the Australian Army and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) uniformed chaplains sailors, soldiers and air personnel.

Statistical Data for both the Archdiocese and CMOA is presented in **Appendix A**.

## The Process of Listening and Discerning

- The Archdiocese and CMOA were led by the Official Handbook (*Vademecum*) issued by the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops from the Vatican in September 2021.
- The Archdiocese and the CMOA followed the guidelines proposed by the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPD) sponsored by Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference.
- The Archdiocese and CMOA continue to be fully engaged in the current four-year process for the Fifth Plenary Council of the Australian Catholic Church which will hold its Second Session in July 2022. The Plenary Council process, discussions and outcomes are the major supporting input for this Synthesis.
- The Archdiocese attempted to engage responses through its Deanery and parish network as well as its major agencies connected to education, health and welfare.
- The CMOA was asked to identify through its chaplains' positions, key stakeholders
- Group and individual responses were encouraged.
- 'Fringe' groups were also to be approached by individuals connected as stakeholders to those groups.

## Consolations (Highs)

- The passion in the responses from individuals and the groups
- The respondents love of and hope for their Church
- The close connection between Plenary and Synod participants
- The Plenary process had well prepared respondents in the listening and discernment process – “walking together

## Desolations (Lows)

- Input did not reflect the broadness and richness of the Archdiocese. There were minimal, if any, responses from outside Canberra.
- The CMOA had only one response
- Next to no youth engagement
- No First Nations responses
- No migrant community responses
- No identifiable responses from schools, health, welfare, religious agencies
- Some responses were erroneous in their critical assertions. The text of these assertions was not adjusted or sanitised for the public release of all responses. It should be noted that the errors have not been presented in this synthesis.

## Introduction to the Submissions

In collating this section of the report, consideration was given to the general focus of each individual submission. The structure of the report follows the suggested headings presented in the Guidelines of the Vademecum. In some cases, the considerations from an individual crossed over into other themes. Every attempt was made to ensure that the integrity of what was presented was indeed retained.

In general, the submissions covered a wide range of issues. Very few of the submissions noted positive elements that influence the life of the Church today. A significant number of submissions either stated or implied a degree of urgency in addressing their response.

Direct quotes from respondents have been italicised.

## Communion

### Companions on the Journey

- *“Communion is circular not hierarchical.”*
- It was expressed that we have a weak understanding of how to journey together and often see a return to pious rituals as a solution.
- Disregarding support for the vulnerable and those on the fringes of society is perceived as a barrier to companionship.
- A strongly repeated theme was the need to build a church that is transparent, accountable, non-clericalist, humble and all inclusive.
- It was noted that senior members of the parish often feel connected, however, the youth see the parish as irrelevant. There is a consistent view that the church is unappealing to young people.
- Quoting Pope Benedict in reference to the church needing holiness not management..... *“If our efforts at renewing the church are to bear any fruit, we must become more spiritual, solidify our foundations and walk towards God.”*
- The Church must draw on the gifts and talents of all the community regardless of gender, sexual orientation, disability, age and ethnicity.
- Generally, the opportunity for groups to meet in preparation for the Plenary Council was positive.

### Listening

- *“We must have mutual respect for all.”*
- Respondents frequently called for Church leaders to display more openness and to listen authentically.
- *“Until governance issues are dealt with and the bishops show they are listening, willing to serve and more inclusive of women and more transparent in decision making, I fear for the church”.*
- A common theme noted that to be a truly Australian Catholic Church, we need to listen to the voice of the Aboriginal people.
- Authentic inter-faith dialogue is viewed as an opportunity that should be explored.

## Speaking Out

- *“We need to be open and accepting not overpowered by rules.”*
- There is an element that feels we are drifting from traditional Catholic values.
- It was noted both directly and implied, that the Church has failed to read the signs of the times and has lost credibility.
- *“A return to the Latin Mass will unite the universal church.”*
- Submissions expressed that the Church has not listened fully to Vatican II.

## Celebrating

- The use of the formal Church language is often seen as disengaging both youth and adults.
- It was commented that we have failed to understand and appreciate the centrality of the Eucharist and acknowledge the working of the Holy Spirit.
- A strong representation felt that the sacramental life of the parish needs reforming and reframing, including marriage, reconciliation and eucharist.
- Submissions frequently expressed the need for well-designed and crafted liturgy, especially with regard to music, proclaimers of the Word, well prepared and delivered homilies.

## Participation

### Authority and Participation

- Two responses were critical of the Synodal process and suggested alternative questions.
- The role of women in the church was consistently raised.
- Responses called for pathways for the indigenous and LGBTQI to participate fully in the life of the church.
- Frequently responses called for immediate and improved governance and shared leadership.
- Pastoral Councils and Archdiocesan Councils are seen as an important part of our governance reform.
- A constant theme is that there is lack of lay involvement in decision making.
- *“We have much to learn about co-responsibility, openness and accountability. This has not been imbedded into our governance.”*
- The lack of involvement by the laity in decision-making regarding parish finances and employment of staff, was given as an example of the power and control exercised by the Parish Priest which hinders healthy engagement.
- It was commented that the laity are slow to come forward.
- Several responses focused on weak structures of accountability.
- There appears to be a poor understanding of synodality across the archdiocese.
- It was noted that a small number of clergy are striving to engage communities in practical ways.
- Dealing with mental health and engaging those with psychological issues is a growing concern both within the Church and in society in general.
- Unaddressed clericalism is seen as a major issue.

- There is a consistently strong view that marriage should not be an impediment to the priesthood.

### Discerning and Deciding

- A strong view expressed that here are few structures to encourage the laity to step forward.
- *“...the way Australians live our lives is in conflict with the life of the church and many of the baptised are no longer listening. If nothing changes the institutional Church will continue to fade into irrelevance.”*
- *“Those who speak on behalf of the church do not represent our diverse society.”*
- Humility and authentic dialogue are frequently listed as central criteria required for the church to flourish.
- *“Often those who speak out are seen as disruptive or out of place”*

### Forming ourselves in Synodality

- One of the most frequently expressed thoughts was the need for adult faith formation.
- Similarly, ongoing formation of the priesthood is seen as essential.
- *“Opportunities to develop our relationships with God and deepen the understanding of our faith should be promoted and accessible to all.”*
- *“The role of the theological knowledge of lay Catholics needs to play a part in these considerations.”*
- *Listening to the voice of the youth is frequently mentioned as crucial.*
- *“It has been a struggle to adapt to priests who have been brought from overseas with little awareness of Australian cultural norms.”*

## Mission

### Sharing responsibility for our common mission

- Systematic, ongoing and graduated formation in faith for the laity and Clergy.
- There is a common view that there is a need to identify and remove barriers to *“a church that welcomes diversity and implements inclusion”*. *“Even committed ministers within the Church are aware of serious roadblocks within the current structures”*
- It was noted that; *“it can be difficult to find a priest who is compassionate and understanding of the complexity of personal relationships in the modern society.”*
- *“Many walk away from participating in the Eucharist and the life of the Church because of the messaging and rules on same sex relationships. It is too hurtful, even though they have a strong desire to be part of the wider Catholic family.”*
- There is a strong view that the laity are not empowered or authorised to go forward.
- *“We must become a Church not caught up in power but caught up in service.”*
- It was noted by many that the mission of the Church’s must always be centered on the risen Jesus.

- Submissions indicated that the laity need help, courage and guidance to take on more responsibility.
- Many commented that we too often neglect those on the fringes.
- “*We need an arms-wide-open church*” where justice and mercy prevail.

### Dialogue in Church and society

- It was commented that Australian spirituality must include First Nations spirituality. It was commented that the Church needs to follow the words of Pope Francis—*“the church must be like a field hospital.”*
- *“I feel that the Catholic Church has lost much in today’s world and society in my opinion has lost relevance, creditability access, importance and trust from the people the church is supposed to help, serve and guide.”*

### Ecumenism

- For some respondents, interfaith participation has been a fruitful experience.
- It was commented that the experience of shared worship, dialogue and action on social justice should be continued and encouraged.

## Key Points – Pertinent Issues

Each Synthesis drafting group has been asked to identify 5-10 key issues that emerged from the Synod submissions.

Considering all the responses the most frequently listed issues fall under the following:

- ❖ Addressing clericalism and the rule for celibate priests.
- ❖ Increasing and enhancing the role of the laity, particularly women.
- ❖ Formation for the laity and particularly ongoing formation for clergy, seminarians and those involved in ministries.
- ❖ Need for a humble, servant Church. A Church that is inclusive, accountable, transparent.

## Conclusion

- Many of the issues raised in the Synod submissions reflect the current societal, political, economic and human tensions in Australia.
- The information gathered in the Plenary Council process will be instrumental in supplying a more detailed response to the Synod research from the Archdiocese and the CMOA.
- The submissions received do not represent the composition of the majority of practicing Catholics in the pews. They do however represent a connected, passionate and growing minority who are wanting to be actively involved in the future of the Australian Catholic Church. The 60-79 year age group were the most represented group for submissions and they comprise the bulk of church attendees in most parishes.
- The large number of non-participants identifies that the Archdiocese and the CMOA did not reach the target audience with regard to the ‘average’ Catholic faithful, minorities and those on the fringes.

- The overwhelming response from women identifies their interest and strong desire for greater involvement in all Church areas.
- Any future strategic direction for the Archdiocese to be a servant Church, reflecting the movement of the Holy Spirit, will need to involve a greater capacity to engage all. In supporting this direction the Synthesis drafting team acknowledge that the Archdiocese has just released details for a Working Party for a Diocesan Pastoral Council, Diocesan Governance Structure and its own response to the ACBC document “Light from the Southern Cross”.
- Ongoing discussions within the CMOA have identified that it needs a stronger identity and relationship with all Australian dioceses and that those issues will be important for the new Bishop who will be appointed in due course.



## Appendices

Appendix A. Statistical data on the Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn– Source: Archdiocesan Chancery Office

### Canberra and Goulburn Archdiocesan Clergy

No of active priests: 40 diocesan priests + 19 Religious priests

Average age of the active priests: 47years

No. of Deacons: 9 (8 permanent + one transitional)

No. of Pastoral Associates/Lay Chaplains: 2

No. of overseas (born overseas) clergy: 21 from Africa, India, Pacific, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, United Kingdom and New Zealand. 12 not incardinated or members of Religious Institutes

No. of retired clergy: 34

No. of Religious: 117 (=5 religious men + 112 Religious women)

No: of Archdiocesan seminarians: 2

### Catholic Education (CE) Schools data

- Total number of staff across the system is 2,755 - this includes Early Learning Centre's (ELC), Schools and CE Office Staff (Source: February 2022 Census)
- Total number of students across the system is 21,737 (14,822 ACT, 6,915 NSW) and 621 ELC Students (Source: February 2022 Census)
- Number of schools is 56 - 29 in ACT in 27 NSW and 8 Early Learning Centre's

### Congregational Schools data

- Total number of staff for the 3 Congregational schools is 442 - this is based on the data provided by the schools for the NCEC survey, most likely this includes only teaching staff (Source: August 2021 Census)
- Total number of students for the 3 Congregational schools is – 3,947 (Source: February 2022 Census)
- Number of schools – 3 (Daramalan College, St Edmund's College, Marist College)

**Catholic Hospitals: 3**

## Appendix B. Statistical data on the Catholic Military Ordinariate of Australia (CMOA)

– Source: Religious Advisory Committee to the Services, October 2020

- Full Time serving Catholics : 10,634
- Part Time: 4,676
- Clergy and Pastoral Associates:
  - Full Time serving Priests – 10 (one on extended leave)
  - Part time serving priests – 11
  - Full time serving Deacons – 4
  - Part time serving Deacons – 5
  - Full time Pastoral Associates – 4
  - Part time Pastoral Associates - 1
- In Service Candidates: 4 (2 x Army, 2 x Air Force)
- Incardinated to CMOA : 8 (2 priest & 6 Deacon)