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# Around the Well

The Newsletter of Concerned Catholics  
Tasmania

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Synod Edition

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Catholics in Tasmania may be aware that there has been a Synod on Synodality Bishops in Rome. These last four weeks have been the first session of the Synod, with the second to be held in October 2024.

I deliberately have the word “may” in my first sentence above.

Sadly, Pope Francis' call for extensive dialogue at all levels of the Church was not heeded in some places, with Tasmania being one of those. We were not given any leadership, encouragement or opportunity to engage in a synodal way. Our Catholic newspaper has largely ignored the event. Where some dioceses have experienced the energy, optimism and hope that discussions have brought, ours has remained resolute in not providing opportunities for open discussion. Where our input to the Synod, as asked for by our Pope, should have started at the very local level, with our voices being melded with those from all parts of Tasmania before being passed into an Oceania synthesis, our voice was not even sought. Yet, somehow, a diocesan submission was prepared.

The parallel with the shallow and token opportunity for diocesan wide consultation at the time of the Australian Plenary is clear. There is a fear of the alternative voice.

What a contrast to the approach of Pope Francis, who respectfully invites open debate, even with those in the Church who vehemently oppose many of his initiatives. His recent pre-Synod response to five Dubia (doubts) from a group of cardinals makes inspiring reading (see [here](#)). He responds with honesty, openness, and as a true teacher.

As this session of the Synod draws to a close, CCT thought it important that you be provided with some information and links should you wish to find out more about the Synod. No doubt there will be more information coming forth in the coming weeks. In particular, we look forward to the “Letter to the People of God” mentioned on the next page, and a promised synthesis of the first session, also due to be released shortly. Let us hope that we will have an opportunity to contribute to the next phase.

We have also added a report, prepared by Trish Hindmarsh, on a remarkable Synod held in another diocese. It shows what can be done when the opportunity is given to dialogue and listen to each other openly.

**Sue Chen**

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## Brief CCT news

**Southern “Voice” Gathering** Over 35 members and friends joined for a morning to reflect on the upcoming referendum. Led by Carey McIver, those present discerned a clear synergy between the invitation of the Uluru Statement and the guidance Of Catholic Social Teachings. Sadly our discernment was not shared and the ‘NO’ vote was successful on Oct 14<sup>th</sup>.

However, the words of Pope John Paul II at Alice Springs in 1986 give hope. ‘If you stay closely united, you are like a tree standing in the middle of a bush-fire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are scorched, and the tough bark is scarred and burned; but inside the tree the sap is still flowing, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree you have endured the flames, and you still have the power to be reborn. The time for this rebirth is now!’

**CCT letter to Australian Catholic Press Association regarding national award won by the *Catholic Standard*.** CCT wrote to ACPA saying that despite limited resources, the *Catholic Standard* has many strengths and a dedicated staff. However, we are concerned “with the vision for the paper and whether it is fulfilling the mission of a Catholic publication”. We suggested that comments such as “excellent balance” and “diverse content” (used by the judges) are “out of touch with the ordinary Catholic experience of our monthly newspaper.” Read the letter [here](#).

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## The Synod on Synodality

**Looking for some background on the Synod?** A Google search will bring up many articles, videos and even some live footage from parts of the Synod. National Catholic Reporter, one of the many sources, has coverage at <https://www.ncronline.org/feature-series/synod-on-synodality/stories> including reports titled *Church hierarchy has 'nothing to fear' from synodality; Story of LGBTQ youth's suicide led synod delegates to cry* and *Bishop on synod drafting committee expresses openness to women deacons*.

There are also many YouTube videos, including one that provides a [short introduction](#) to the purpose and process of Synod. It includes part of the Pope's opening address where he says that the Synod is not a parliament but where we join "with the Holy Spirit as a protagonist" and "walk together with the gaze of Jesus."

### **The following update was received from the Pastoral Office of the Australian Bishop's Conference.**

"The Synod of Bishops concludes this Sunday 29 October. But prior to that will be some important work done.

After three weeks of discussions, the final week will be focussing on synthesising the conversations and producing a report. Titled a "Letter to the People of God", it is intended to be a "a transitional text, based on the experience of the Assembly, which will contain the points where there is consensus and those where there is a lack of agreement, as well as open questions that will need to be studied in depth from a canonical, theological, and pastoral point of view, to be verified together with the people of God" (Cardinal Hollerich).

While the first assembly concludes this Sunday, we are reminded that the Synod itself is ongoing, with the second assembly occurring in October 2024. What will take place in the upcoming year, the role of the report, and the ongoing role of the people of God in participating in that process, is yet to be addressed.

There are news articles providing more about the preparation of the report:

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2023-10/synod-briefing-module-b3-presented-at-12th-general-congregation.html>

<https://cathnews.com/2023/10/23/synod-assembly-to-issue-letter-to-the-people-of-god/>

We encourage all to continue in prayer for the participants and for the outcomes of the Synod. The following prayer, composed by Lia Ajith & Family of Muscat, Oman has been shared for those praying for the Synod:

*Heavenly Father, we humbly pray to renew the soul of the humanity which Our Lord Jesus Christ redeemed by His Holy Cross and Holy Spirit strengthened at Pentecost.*

*As we walk in the path of Synod of synodality with listening, dialogue, striving for truth in humanity lost in path of self-love.*

*Heavenly Father, your will be done on earth through the Synod. Ignite the minds of people to seek your will.*

*May the precious blood of Jesus cleanse us and fill us with the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel.  
Amen.*

Other prayer resources can also be found here: <https://www.prayforthesynod.va/en/>

## **Australians at the Synod**

A number of our Australian and Oceanian participants and advisors have been called on in recent times to provide their voices to the issues addressed at the Synod.

Bishop Shane Mackinlay provided a testimony on 18 October of his experience with the Australian Plenary Council. A copy of his speech is available at <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/1810/EN---Mackinlay-ORIGINALE.pdf>

Grace Wrakia, speaking on behalf of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, provided a perspective from those of the smaller nations who are sometimes overlooked: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2023-10/at-the-synod-prayers-for-victims-of-war.html>

While Bishop Anthony Randazzo and University of Notre-Dame Australia professor Renee Kohler-Ryan were among those who spoke at the media briefing concerning a number of issues including the role of women in the Catholic Church and a welcome for LGBTQ+ Catholics. <https://cathnews.com/2023/10/18/synod-members-urge-patience-as-process-unfolds/>

## **Spiritual Reflection by Fr Timothy Radcliffe**

Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP has been instrumental in nurturing the spiritual lives of those at the Synod, offering meditations at the Retreat prior to the Synod, and providing reflections during the Synod itself. Below are a number of links to his reflections which can also aid personal meditations or group reflections:

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2023-10/synod-spiritual-reflection-by-fr-timothy-radcliffe-at-12th-gc.html>

<https://www.synod.va/en/highlights/retreat-for-the-participants-of-the-synodal-assembly.html>

[https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/1810/EN---Radcliffe\\_ORIGINALE.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/1810/EN---Radcliffe_ORIGINALE.pdf)

## **Synod Resources**

Resources supporting and related to the Synod can be found on the Google Drive folder: of the Pastoral Office. <https://bit.ly/SynodResources> which is being updated regularly. Further resources can also be found on the Australian Synodal Church webpage: <https://catholic.org.au/synodalchurch> and on the official website for the Synod 2021-2024: <https://www.synod.va/en.html> “

**Another late commentary:** [Conversion theme emerging strongly in Synod meetings: Archbishop Costelloe](#)

## **A Synod in Parramatta**

On the weekend of 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> October, while Pope Francis and the Synod on Synodality members were seated at round tables in Rome to continue their discernment about the future of the Catholic Church, another

Canonical Synod was being held in the Parramatta/Blue Mountains Diocese in Australia, the first in its history. Almost 300 Catholics, delegates from every corner of the diocese, with divergent backgrounds, gifts and aspirations, together with vibrant staff teams, six *periti* (experts in theology, scripture and Church life), and invited observers from other Churches and Catholic organisations, gathered in the new conference space at the Parramatta CommBank Stadium, a stone's throw from the Cathedral.

From the joyous opening Mass and welcome from Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv. in the striking Cathedral mother church, the assembly moved in candlelit procession to the Stadium. En route a Smoking Ceremony and Welcome to Country led by a local Aboriginal elder drew the attention of passers-by and of the police, who came to investigate (it was the eve of the referendum). They left shortly after, smiling and reassured.

On Saturday morning the work of discerning around the six themes, developed as a result of six months of consultation and 'prayerful conversations' across the diocese, began in earnest. Marist Brother David Hall, a facilitator for the Plenary Council, and I each facilitated three of the sessions.

Each Theme session included two rounds of dialogue and listening, structured to allow each person time to express their personal response to the Theme and then to what they were hearing from group members. There was a period of silence between each person's expression. There followed brief interventions from the floor, often very moving examples of truth-telling from personal experience as a Catholic. Finally, a vote was taken on each of the Resolutions related to the theme, distilled from the months of consultation through at least 60 listening and dialogue sessions, and over 1,000 written submissions, involving more than 5,000 individuals. Each Theme was introduced with a powerful video re-presentation drawing together the scripture, sub-themes, guiding questions and Resolutions that are expressed in the Synod 'Working Document'.

Overall, the 'Resolutions' to be put to the vote were assented to. One resolution was redrafted and a further vote was taken in the final session. The assembly understood that the Synod was planned and carried out in strict conformity with the requirements of Canon Law governing Diocesan Synods (Canons 460-468) and that the voting was 'consultative' (advisory) with the final authority regarding each of the Resolutions to be exercised by the bishop.

The spirit of joy, enthusiasm and amazement at the power of 'synodality in action' as people shared love, hopes, doubts and faith, did not waver, helped no doubt by the rich liturgies and rituals, contemplative atmosphere, sense of belonging with Bishop Long in a 'discipleship of equals', music from young, talented local musicians and the delicious shared meals. Many participants commented on the openness of heart and mind, the 'buzz' of expectation and excitement, accompanied by mutual respect and regard, that characterised the event at every point. There were both laughter and tears as members openly and freely, often at great personal cost, expressed their diverse experiences of fulfilment, alienation and hope within our Church. The counselling services provided by CatholicCare proved invaluable for an event such as this, where essential truth-telling opened deep wounds for some people.

The final Mass on Sunday evening in the Cathedral was a joyous celebration of a faith-filled event, a huge effort, obviously richly blessed by the Spirit of God, with Christ at the heart of every step. The People of God in the Diocese seemed proud, relieved, even euphoric, and grateful for the commitment and hard work of Bishop Long, the Diocesan Chancellor Sr Ailsa McKinnon RSJ, the clergy and the very energetic and committed staff teams, led by Lead Facilitator for the Synod journey, Qwayne Guevara, also Manager for Youth. All parties collaborated to bring this event to birth. This first Australian Diocesan Synod since the Plenary Council and its bespoke documentation provide a valuable prototype and resource for shared learning across our national Church.

Each diocese will need to make its own formal, public response to the call of Pope Francis and the Holy Spirit to be a 'synodal' Church, walking together, refreshed and open to be the bearers of the 'Good News' Jesus came to announce. Congratulations to the Parramatta/Blue Mountains Diocese.

**Trish Hindmarsh**