



Methods and Process – Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay Synod

Synod 2012 – Go Make Disciples

In May 2011, the Diocese of Broken Bay celebrated its 25th anniversary. In recognition of this important milestone, Bishop David Walker, after consulting both the Council of Priests and the Diocesan Pastoral Council, announced that he would be convening a **Diocesan Synod** in Broken Bay.

A Diocesan Synod in the Catholic Church is, by definition, an assembly of priests, religious and lay people representative of the whole diocesan community, who are invited by the Bishop of the diocese to advise him on matters concerning the good of the entire diocese.

In Broken Bay there had been two **Diocesan Plans**, the last of which was entitled *Pastoral Care for Evangelisation 2006-2010*. The Synod provided an opportunity to look at what had been achieved as a Diocese in the light of these two plans over the past 25 years and to provide clear vision and direction for the future.

To facilitate the progress of the Synod, a Synod Task Force was appointed by Bishop David Walker. The Synod Task Force was chaired by Fr Brian Moloney and included members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, members of the Clergy, a representative from the Catholic Schools Office, and Diocesan staff members David Penny (Curia Co-ordinator) Carole Gan (Director Parish Support Unit). A project co-ordinator for the Synod was appointed, Natalie Acton, who was also a member of the task force.

A Synod Logo and Motto was developed. The people of the Diocese were also invited to submit prayers that could be used as official Synod prayers for the events of the Synod.

Synod Outcome

The outcome of the Synod was to be that the people of the Diocese of Broken Bay, would present to Bishop David Walker a set of Synod Statements which represented the hopes and vision of the people for their local church. These statements were to be accompanied by a set of recommendations or factors that should be present in order for the statements to be realised.

The task force determined that the outcomes of the Synod should have application for all the people of the Diocese. Rather than have a document or presentation which identified actions or recommendations from a Diocesan perspective, outcomes should be presented so that they were applicable at a personal, parish/agency and diocesan level. In this way the Synod could have implications for all the faithful for the Diocese.

Professional Partners

During the Synod, the Diocese of Broken Bay engaged two professional partners to provide support throughout the Synod. Integroe Partners were engaged to facilitate the major events of the Synod and to provide advice on process. Mary Leahy an associate at Integroe Partners was assigned to the project. The Diocese also engaged a Spiritual Advisor, Sr Christine Manning, to advise on process and facilitate the spiritual elements of the major events.

The professional partners facilitated the major events of the Synod, provided input regarding Synod processes and had a critical role in the synthesis of the final outcomes.

Phases of the Synod

The decision was taken in the formation of the Synod plan that the focus of the Synod would be the engagement of a large number of people with a diversity of experiences and backgrounds. It was agreed that the most effective way to accomplish this was for the synod to be comprised of a continuous process that was punctuated by large gatherings. Rather than centre the Synod on one or two large “representative” events, people were to be engaged wherever possible in their local environment with the intent to engage as many people as possible. It was also thought that more authentic feedback could be obtained from people in their own environment in smaller numbers than in large events where much time is spent on logistics and time can be limited for real input from participants. It was also recognised that in large events often there are people who are overlooked or do not have the chance to provide their input

From November 2010 to the conclusion of the Synod consultation in March 2012 :

- a survey was conducted which obtained over 5000 responses
- two large Curia staff events were conducted with approximately 110 staff attending each one
- meetings with clergy were conducted in Deanery groups, individually and at the Clergy Twilight Conference

- Approximately 1000 people were engaged in participating in meetings that sought their input on Synod issues
- Consultation time was allocated at Clergy Principals meetings (2X)
- Consultation meetings were held with Women and the Australian Church, Australian Reforming Catholic and the Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Ministry Group.
- Consultations were conducted with parents of children attending Catholic Schools in each of the three geographical regions of the Diocese.
- Regular input was sought regarding process and outcomes from the Council of Priests and Diocesan Pastoral Council.

The process for the Synod was as follows:

1. Consultation One

Consultation conducted with

- Curia Staff (Nov 2010)
- Clergy (Feb 2011)
- Parishes (Feb 2011)
- Parish Pastoral Councils (Feb 2011)
- Catholic Schools (Feb 2011)
- Families of Students attending SRE (Feb2011)

Due to the large amount of data received through parish consultation, Regional meetings were conducted on the Peninsula, Central Coast and North Shore/Hornsby to synthesise the data received through Parish surveys.

The results of these surveys and meetings were presented to the first Synod gathering. When these results were synthesised there were three major areas of concern that emerged from the surveys that were recognised to be significant right across the Diocese.

All parishes were given copies of their survey results so that they could provide this feedback to their parishioners. The data provided included feedback on what people liked about the parish, their accomplishments over the last 25 years and their concerns for the future. Data was provided with the intent that each parish could address their own local issues as presented by the Synod survey.

2. Synod Gathering One

Information that had been collected through the first round of consultation was presented at the Synod Gathering One. This gathering included 130 people from across the Diocese representing parishes, Diocesan agencies and various Diocesan groups. The gathering centred on the development of three Synod statements emerging from the data that had been collected in the consultation. These statements represented a positive vision in response to

the major concerns for the future identified in the consultation. Additionally this group provided feedback on the “enablers” and “blockers” of these statements as we look toward the future.

A Synod Working Party, made up of 20 people that were at Synod Gathering One, met on August 20 to finalise the wording of these statements and to consider how might we celebrate, educate, inform and ritualise the distribution of these statements to the people of the Diocese.

3. Consultation Two

The consultation phase between Synod session 1 and 2 was a targeted consultation seeking to identify and examine examples where the Synod Statements or parts there of were already being realised.

The method for this consultation involved “walking with” the people, groups and organisations within the Diocese where the Synod statements (or parts thereof) were being realised. This “walking with” would involve accompanying, observing and listening to the people involved with these groups (including group leaders, co-ordinators, participants and recipients) in order to examine the structures and processes of that group and to consider the elements of leadership and communication that enable the group to accomplish their outcomes. The observations were then distilled to develop a set of principles that could be applied in order to realise the Synod statements in a wide variety of contexts.

Agency Consultation (Oct 2011-Dec2011)

Agency leaders were asked to nominate programs from their agencies that were examples of the Synod statements being realised. Nominations were sought from Centacare, Catholic Schools Office and the Broken Bay Institute. Once nominations were received a consultation team met with, interviewed and researched the various programs that had been nominated. The consultation team met each month to review progress and synthesise their results.

At the same time parishes were asked to nominate parish ministries and groups that were lived examples of the Synod statements or parts thereof. Nominations were received and assessed throughout December.

Parish Ministry Consultation (Feb- March 2012)

Parish Ministries that had been identified throughout the nomination process were consulted with during February and March. Consultation included meetings with ministry co-ordinators, participants, volunteers and recipients. Consultation was conducted by the Project Co-ordinator- Synod and synthesis was conducted by Mary Leahy, Christine Manning and Natalie Acton.

Leadership Consultation (March 2012)

At the first Synod Gathering and throughout the consultation leadership was seen as a significant enabler of the realisation of the statements. Leadership was essential to the people's vision for the Diocese being realised. For this reason a leadership consultation was conducted throughout March 2012. Consultations were conducted with the Clergy at their Twilight Conference (approx 60 clergy), with School Leaders (approx 40) and Diocesan Agency Leaders (15). These consultations considered the capabilities of leadership required by the statements, the challenges for leadership presented by the statements and the support required for those called to lead in this environment.

Synod Conclusion

It was decided by the Synod Task Force that Synod outcomes should be presented in the form of a website which could be accessed by anyone in the Diocese. In this way the wisdom of the Synod and outcomes could be applied in a personal, parish or Diocesan context.

The website presents information in four major categories – Synod Outcomes, The Synod Statements, The Stories (consultation subjects), and Resources.

Rather than have a select group of representatives review the data gathered during the Synod to make a limited set of recommendations, the decision was taken that all information should be available to everyone so that action could be taken in local contexts suitable to that context. In this way it is hoped that the learnings of the Synod will be applied in far reaching and creative ways in a wide variety of contexts across the Diocese for the benefit of local communities.

In addition a Diocesan Committee will be formed to review the implications of the Synod Outcomes from a Diocesan perspective and to address the Diocesan issues that were raised in the initial Synod consultation.

5. Synod Session 2 (May 25/26 2011)

Synod Session Two marks the end of the Synod. The evening includes a formal launch of the Synod website and a handing over of the outcomes to local communities and Diocesan agencies.