

# DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HOW DOES GOD WANT US TO LEAD AND GOVERN  
FOR A MISSIONARY SYNODAL CHURCH IN  
THE DIOCESE OF BALLARAT?



Firefly AI

Seeing the Holy Spirit as a “wild goose”, moving in our lives in unexpected ways,  
with a tendency to disrupt and surprise.

In early 2024 Bishop Paul Bird asked the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Panel to facilitate a Diocesan Assembly as part of its 150th year anniversary celebrations. Delegates from all communities including our twenty-nine Parishes, Diocesan Agencies, Councils and Commissions, Catholic Education, Catholic Health and Aged Care, Catholic Social Services, Clergy and Religious Congregations within the Diocese were invited to attend over two days at the gathering held in November. The focus of discussion at the assembly was leadership and governance and how each can be promoted within our Diocesan communities.

In preparation for the assembly, there were many smaller gatherings throughout the Diocese to reflect on existing leadership within our communities and to share thoughts in a prayerful atmosphere, which followed a method of 'Conversations in the Spirit'. This process of 'Synodal Conversations' was then also the methodology adopted at the assembly.

During the assembly, delegates were assigned to a table group of up to eight people with a facilitator appointed to each table. Each delegate was asked to respond to a series of questions with interludes of silence to allow participants to really listen to what other delegates had to say. There are two necessary attitudes that are fundamental to this process: active listening and speaking from the heart. Each table facilitator was also provided additional support in the synodal process to assist delegates work through each question.

The assembly confirmed that there is strong support for adopting 'Synodal Conversations' as the process moving forward. This collaborative and reflective approach resonates with the Diocese's shared commitment to listening, discerning and walking together as a community, a commitment to synodality - walking together, sharing joys of faith and hope. "Orientated towards mission, synodality involves gathering at all levels of the Church for mutual listening, dialogue, and community discernment. It also involves reaching consensus as an expression of Christ rendering Himself present, He who is alive in the Spirit. Furthermore, it consists in reaching decisions according to differentiated co-responsibilities. Along these lines, we can understand better what it means to say that synodality is a constitutive dimension of the Church." (Synod report 1/28)

The data provided from the assembly offered valuable feedback on how the diocese can better serve and engage with all the different communities of the diocese (a community of communities). There were several themes that recurred in many of the table groups.

The Key Themes from the assembly are:

- Mission & Identity
- Relationships
- Transformation & Conversion
- Formation
- Structural Change
- Trust

The Pastoral Planning Panel will provide a comprehensive summary of the thoughts, testimonies and themes from the Assembly. The report is broken into three parts (1. Key Themes, 2. Delegates Commitments and 3. What Next). The details contained in the report are based on data collected from the synodal conversations at the assembly with the Pastoral Planning Panel discerning the key themes from the captured data. Each theme also shows common "indicators" or one-line statements that emerged throughout the assembly that support that specific theme.

The detailed summary will be provided in due course.