

DISCERNMENT IN COMMON – The Dioceses Synodal Journey

In 2021, Pope Francis opened the global Synod on Synodality and invited every diocese throughout the world to enter into a process of listening, dialogue and discernment with their communities. The Synod focused on the themes of *Communion, Participation and Mission*.

The process that followed included the development of a diocesan synthesis followed by a national synthesis of the discernment that was undertaken.

Following the gatherings of representatives of the Church from around the world in Rome, a Final Document was produced, calling the Church to become more deeply a community that listens, discerns, and walks together. Central to this vision is a renewed commitment to wider participation in the life and mission of the Church and a greater appreciation of the baptismal calling of all the faithful. This echoes Pope Benedict XVI's emphasis on the principle of co-responsibility within the Church which he spoke of some years prior.

With the election of Pope Leo XIV, the Church awaited his guidance on the future direction of the work of the synod process. In his first address following his election, Pope Leo from St Peter's in Rome, reaffirmed his commitment to a synodal Church, saying: *"To all you brothers and sisters of Rome, Italy, and all the world, we want to be a synodal Church, walking and always seeking peace, charity and closeness, especially to those who are suffering."*

In late 2025, an Implementation Document was released with the endorsement of Pope Leo XIV. The document outlines the next phase of the synodal journey and provides guidance for helping synodality take deeper root within local Churches. This implementation phase focuses on four key areas:

- Embedding synodal practices: Developing sustainable structures for dialogue, discernment, and co-responsibility.
- Strengthening formation: Equipping clergy and laity alike to live and lead synodally, grounded in Scripture, prayer, and discernment.
- Enhancing mission: Renewing pastoral priorities to reflect listening, inclusion, and missionary discipleship.
- Fostering accountability: Creating mechanisms for review, transparency, and feedback within the life of the Church.

As part of this next phase, every diocese around the world is to establish a Diocesan Synod Team. Bishop Michael has brought together a small diocesan team whose work currently has two primary focuses:

1. The Implementation Document emphasises that a sound understanding of the Synod's Final Document is essential. The team is therefore studying the document together to develop a shared understanding of its vision and implications for diocesan life.
2. One of the primary tools used throughout the synodal process has been Ignatian Spiritual Conversation, often referred to as Conversation in the Spirit. This prayerful process enables participants to listen deeply to one another and the Holy Spirit within a community. It has proved to be a powerful means of communal discernment and a practical way of fostering a synodal culture. A process based on this model has now been prepared for parish leadership groups across the Diocese.



Over recent months, Bishop Michael has begun sharing the vision and priorities that have been emerging for him for the diocese. As part of this next stage of discernment, he is inviting parish leadership (Parish Pastoral Council, Senior Leadership Team or a group of parish leaders) to gather for a spiritual conversation based on the following question:

How is the Lord calling our parish to worship, catechesis and witness?

The Diocese's approach to synodal implementation is intentionally gentle and practical. Rather than introducing large-scale programmes, the focus is on embedding spiritual conversation as a regular and effective tool within parish life, helping communities grow in prayerful discernment, shared responsibility, and missionary renewal.

To read Bishop Michael's vision and priorities for the Diocese, and to download the handout outlining the process, please visit [Synodal Communal Discernment - Catholic Diocese of Christchurch](#) or contact Mike Stopforth, email mstopforth@cdoc.nz or phone 027 5398542