



CATHOLIC  
ARCHDIOCESE  
OF SYDNEY

# **CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF SYDNEY REPORT TO THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS 2021–2023**

**MAY 2022**



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission

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# INTRODUCTION

## Data

This Archdiocesan Synodal report is based on data retrieved from submissions to the Plenary Council 2018-2020, data from reports to the Archdiocese of Sydney from the Plenary Council Working Group (PCWG) in April 2019 and September 2021, data submitted to the Synod 2021-2023 Consultation process and retrieved from the NCPR Report on Submissions from March 2022, and data submitted directly to the Sydney Plenary Council (and Synod) Working Group.

## Methodology

At the outset of the Plenary Process a two - tiered approach was taken to include as many diverse voices within the Archdiocese as possible. This involved the engagement of parishes on the one hand and direct consultation with 12 groups involved in various roles vital to the work of the Archdiocese such as Catholic schools, universities, church agencies, youth groups, and other Catholic communities. In most cases, the early Plenary Council phases occurred in the form of small group gatherings, although many individual submissions were received, and several larger assemblies were held.

Contributions to the Synod consultation process were submitted from individuals, family groups, a range of parishes (52% of group responses and 70% of individual response were from parishioners over 60 years of age), and certain groups (including: an Archdiocesan Synod Reflection Day group of 36 people, the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Catalyst for Renewal, Australian Catholics for Church Reform, the Spanish speaking community). Some groups of the faithful appear not to be represented in the Synod consultation process (e.g., some migrant communities, Opus Dei); however, this may be because they did not identify themselves as members of groups in their contributions, but only as individuals. While Youth groups had been engaged in the initial stages of the Plenary Council process and in the Australian Catholic Bishops Youth Survey during 2017, their participation declined and there was very limited involvement of youth (2% of group responses and 3% of individual responses were under 29 years of age) in the Synod process, despite efforts to attract them.

From 2018 the Sydney Archdiocese PCWG engaged 60 parish ambassadors and 90 family educators in initial training. As momentum grew, the PCWG engaged with 125 parish ambassadors from 82 parish groups, conducted listening, dialogue and discernment sessions and retreat/reflection days in response to feedback requesting spiritual formation. The PCWG presented at a clergy conference, deanery meetings and parishes to publicize both the Plenary Council and Synod processes. Br Ian Cribb SJ facilitated spiritual conversations for gatherings of young clergy and key clergy as well as for the PCWG members. In addition, a retreat day led by Fr Aloysius

Rego OCD was held for PC Members in February 2021, and while Covid prevented gatherings in 2021, several occurred via Zoom; one of these - our September reflection day focussed on synodality - was led by Sr Monica Cavanagh RSJ and was attended by approximately 40 people including Plenary Council members from CRA.

## Communication

In addition to using Parish bulletin notices and direct communication with parish ambassadors, the PCWG arranged for production of a 2020 series of videos on spirituality and a 2021 video<sup>1</sup> explaining the interconnectedness of the Plenary Council, the Synod, and the Archdiocese's Go Make Disciples program to draw attention to the Plenary Council and Synod processes as part of our ongoing spiritual journey. The videos were uploaded to the Archdiocesan website and links were sent to all parishes (See Appendix 3).

## Submissions

More than 2600 young people aged between 16-29 participated in the Youth Synod process, which represents approximately 0.4 percent of the Catholic population of the Sydney Archdiocese. Throughout the Plenary Council-Synod process over 700 submissions were received from approximately 2000 individuals, which represents approximately 0.3 percent of the Catholic population of the Sydney Archdiocese. The NCPR received 62 submissions (12 group and 50 individual) through the Synod portal and a further 6 were submitted directly to the PCWG; 100 people were represented in the groups, bringing the total number of people participating in the Synod process to 156, which represents approximately 0.03 percent of the Catholic population of the Sydney Archdiocese. 62% of respondents were female and 34% male.

## Process and Interactions

The commitment of ambassadors to the Youth Synod, Plenary Council and Synod processes was encouraging and uplifting, as was the engagement of younger clergy and the willingness of deaneries to accept presentations as we attempted to gain insight into how parishes could be better engaged.

The reflection days both on zoom and in person provided an opportunity for the participants to engage in conversation, reflect on differing views and share their hopes for the Church, under the guidance of expert facilitators. As one participant noted, the engagement of the faithful in the Plenary and Synod processes provided an impetus for greater connection across the diocese.

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1. "A Church on Mission, Synodality and Discipleship in the Sydney Archdiocese".



Unfortunately, by the time the Synod was launched Covid lockdowns, and the ongoing Plenary Council processes led to general fatigue and lack of enthusiasm. While there was support from some clergy during the process, the level of engagement of other clergy was disappointing.

## Overview

Overall, submissions to the Synod consultation process indicate a conviction that renewed effort toward synodal formation in all dioceses and parishes is crucial if the Church is to be more fruitful in mission. This conviction is underpinned by evidence of deep faith, love of the Church, gratitude for the dedication and hard work of many clergy and religious, and hope for the enlivening of the life of the Church in Australia. Despite differing and sometimes conflicting views as to how this might be achieved in relation to certain issues, the data reveals a considerable degree of agreement in relation to other issues (e.g., role of laity, liturgical revitalisation, participation of women). The data also call us to recognize that the synodal roots of the Church will not be rediscovered unless we can more effectively enact the way we live our communion, the way we achieve participation and the way we open ourselves to the mission of the Church.

## Structure

The data below records contributors' perceptions under the themes and sub-themes of the Synod as outlined in the Official Synod documents. In accordance with the suggestions of the NCPR each sub-theme is treated under 4 headings (where data was provided):

General initial Comments, Obstacles and Challenges, implementation suggestions and Divergent Views.

Finally, the conclusion lists the 6 ideas or issues that appeared to receive the most emphasis among the submissions.

# COMMUNION

## I. COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

Listening and sharing as a diverse people of one faith creates a sense of connection; internal divisions arise when we label Catholics (liberal, conservative, progressive, traditionalist). We must: i. Recognise ourselves as one people; ii. Find ways to embrace and critically examine a diversity of views; iii. Expect differences and uncertainty; iv. Put aside “culture, liturgical, theological and class” wars to emphasize gentleness, compassion, and trust; v. Go to where we are most uncomfortable, meet people where they are and journey with them.

An atmosphere of welcome, curiosity and joy must pervade responses to those approaching or returning to the Church. We must: i. Be more inclusive of a broad range of people in need and be devoted to responding to their differing and specific needs and alleviating their suffering<sup>2</sup>; ii. Place greater emphasis on advocacy and service to marginalized, silenced, and erased people among us and be open to being evangelized by them so that we live out Gospel values via pastoral and spiritual support initiatives; iii. More accurately represent the cross section of society, respect differences, seek those things which unite us while always being faithful to the scriptures and to Church teaching and Tradition.

### Obstacles, Challenges

Opportunity to meet parishioners outside our own circle is limited. We have mostly lost contact with the young and parents in our schools, who report being concerned by male domination and inequality in the Church. In parishes, those marginalized include “those who do not simply do what Father wants, the thinkers and those who ask questions”.

The lives and contributions of consecrated men and women are insufficiently appreciated and integrated into parish life.

### Implementation Suggestions

Develop plans to attract and welcome new parishioners: recruit volunteers to greet those arriving at Mass, move outside our own circle, reach out to those we are not engaging. Use Christmas, Easter, baptisms, weddings, funerals to welcome the community; explain the liturgy; show that the tradition makes sense, responds to human needs, and can make a difference in our lives.

Find ways to enhance contact with the young and parents in our schools and to develop their understanding of Church teaching. The work of currently employed family educators should be celebrated and encouraged as providing a valuable link between school, family and parish.

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2. Refugees, poor people; disabled people; Aboriginal people, those experiencing same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria, homeless people, those who sleep rough, mentally ill people and others who may be on the peripheries.

Encourage small informal grassroots events and activities to provide positive experiences of community in cities and regional areas (e.g., Surry Hills 2020 Lunch initiative; home visits to the elderly/ill); create opportunities for the young to associate with good models to discuss challenges they face in life; hold occasional rural and regional gatherings; include participants from Oceania & Asian regions; encourage and sponsor participation of youth at WYDs.

Church-based youth programs addressing issues rated as of highest concern to young people could be highly beneficial in engaging them (school or study; mental health; body image; drugs or alcohol; friendships and relationships).<sup>3</sup> Do not assume that a greater focus on issues of sexuality or gender identity is what young people desire from the Church.

Identify and respond to the life challenges of some parishioners (deaf people, disabled people) and link them with current works of the Church (e.g., Ephpheta Centre).

Show gratitude for the valuable presence and prophetic witness to Christ of religious congregations living their charisms; invite them to use their gifts in all levels of Church life.

Work to raise up a new generation of consecrated men and women whose lives should be seen as a gift to be promoted and where possible integrated into parish life.

Bishops must encourage, carefully discern new expressions of religious life and ministry to be supported within Church guidelines.

### **Divergent Views**

The exclusion of gay people is the greatest reason young people are rejecting the faith. **VERSUS**

Those in irregular, illicit or immoral relationships cannot be in full communion with the Church as they are regarded as being in a state of mortal sin.

Confused understanding around the Church's teaching on the truth and meaning of human sexuality and the way these teachings are rejected as hateful in popular culture is a significant reason young people struggle to accept the faith, e.g., a 'fluid approach' to human sexuality and sexual behaviour is now deemed normative;

Sexuality did not rank as a top 5 issue in responses to the 2017 Youth Survey. Rather, in the Archdiocese of Sydney, the top five issues were: school or study; mental health; body image; drugs or alcohol; friendships and relationships.

## **II. LISTENING**

The Australian Bishops must listen/continue to listen respectfully, honestly, taking account of the voice of the laity at every level of the Church, and within the Plenary Council and Synod consultation processes.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Australian Catholic Bishops Youth Survey, National Centre for Pastoral Research, 2017.

4. See Appendix 2, p.2.

The Church should both evangelize and respond to concerns of the faithful with an open heart, to avoid disillusionment, find solutions and make positive change possible.

In community dialogue we must all be prepared for the unexpected and unpalatable, as well as open to new and life-giving ideas. Use the Spiritual Conversation method to facilitate dialogue.

Assist foreign priests in learning how to approach and interact with people and be inclusive; e.g. via Sydney Archdiocesan Enculturation Program for overseas clergy.

Recognize a complementary task for Australian-born priests and parishioners to learn how to approach, interact and be broadly inclusive of migrant communities.

Recognize that the multicultural nature of the Sydney presbyterate is reflective of the many cultures of those to whom the Church ministers.

Listen to and assist young people to address issues that matter most to them, rather than assuming they want the Church to replicate secular culture. Youth Survey respondents indicated they wanted: more faith formation, guidance, help and counselling in personal and relationship issues, and opportunities for greater involvement.<sup>5</sup>

## Obstacles And Challenges

Lack of synodal process in some parishes or dioceses; many clergy do not reach out to the laity or fail to respond to communication from parishioners. Laity appear to interpret this as disrespect and even contempt. Priests sometimes veto the voice of the people. Unable to engage in dialogue with the authoritarian clergy, laity feel unhappy, frustrated, and disconnected.

Listening to young people's voices remains a challenge for the Church. Young people report negativity as a result of unpleasant personal experiences with a church member, occasions when their comments were ignored and the seemingly closed-minded, biased attitudes of some.

Priests can also be victims of silence when their needs are ignored by Church hierarchy.

## Divergent Views

We must appreciate the gifts of Aboriginal spirituality and incorporate their prayers, expressions of Spirit, sacred art, and symbolism. *Is the Church genuinely committed to:*  
a) *Exploring and incorporating Aboriginal Spirituality into our liturgy (as suggested by Pope St John Paul II in Alice Springs)?* b) *Reconciliation?* VERSUS

Appreciation of Aboriginal spirituality, prayers, expressions of God, sacred art, and symbolism must not conflict with a Christian understanding or liturgical norms.

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5. Australian Catholic Bishops Youth Survey, National Centre for Pastoral Research, 2017.



### III. SPEAKING OUT

Identify and train positive, contemporary Catholic speakers as evangelists for the Church.

Listen without prejudice to those who “speak boldly.” Avoid simply appeasing influential or vocal minorities. Engage respectfully, charitably and critically, challenging points raised as appropriate.

When required, speak truth to power in the name of Jesus, despite personal cost.

“Domestic violence is an important societal issue but in my 79 years I have never heard a homily on it.”

#### Implementation Suggestions

Create intentional spaces of dialogue for candid and “hard” conversations, protest and debate; model calm, respectful conversation despite divergent views; demonstrate a robust Catholic intellectual life.

#### Divergent Views

All Catholics must act to advance the mission of the Church, both laity and ordained; it is not always the case that bishops and priests must exclusively speak for the Church. VERSUS

An authoritative voice to speak on behalf of the Australian Church is needed. Consider creating an Australian Catholic Synod, a standing authoritative body consisting of bishops, religious orders and laity that consults on the Church’s position on public social policy before individual bishops claim the right to speak publicly on behalf of the Church. The establishment of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council provides a good model.

### IV. CELEBRATION

Focus on access to basics: more fulfilling prayer lives; better formation in the sacraments; revitalisation of liturgy; enriched faith formation; ongoing spiritual education and direction in parishes, Catholic institutions, and agencies.

The Church must: i. Become more strongly grounded in spirituality, avoiding an institutional mindset; ii. Make celebrating liturgy more accessible; iii. Encourage participation, communal preparation and sharing with celebrants; iv. Use liturgy to incentivize outreach, guide mission.

Liturgies must be: i. Inclusive of all (e.g., youth-led); ii. Relevant rather than archaic; iii. Reverent; iv. Contemporary; v. comprehensible, and reflective of both women and men as equals in the eyes of God.

Recognise diversity, allow flexibility in prayer and spiritual life so that liturgies and practices are more meaningful to individuals and communities and help them in developing personal relationships with Christ. There is space for more movement, colour, creativity, and imagination in practices.

Reintroduce 3rd Rite of Reconciliation and make penitential rites simpler and communal, celebrating acceptance, forgiveness, and love. Help people understand the differences between the different Rites of Reconciliation and the value and appropriateness of each.

Make schools more effective instruments of evangelization; recognize schools as the engine-room of the Church and families as partners with schools and parishes. Reimagine how to link the 50% of Catholic students now in State or other non-Catholic schools to parishes; consider initiatives at deanery, diocesan, national levels.

Do more to promote and celebrate the rich tradition of the Church: its music, art, architecture.

Ensure that the best Australian and other catechetical resources are available and promoted on the ACBC or diocesan websites.

### Obstacles, Challenges

The separation of the Catholic school from the parish; Catholic education's failure to form students well at all levels and their disengagement post-school.

The occurrence of personal and private devotions during Eucharistic celebrations, which is divisive within parishes.

### Implementation Suggestions

The value of *ad orientem* and *Novus Ordo* should be explained and supported by the faithful. Offer one "streamlined" Sunday Mass for busy people: ensure a significant, enriching spiritual experience, "time out" for contemplation, a short homily, only quiet instrumental music.

Place more emphasis on the sacrament of Penance. Reintroduce 3rd Rite of Reconciliation and make penitential rites simpler and communal, celebrating acceptance, forgiveness, and love.

Offer retreats, activities, social outlets to revitalise and strengthen parish life;<sup>6</sup> improve religious literacy (via catechesis for adults and children).

Facilitate interaction between parishioners and encourage self-directed, cluster groups that gather to pray, share faith, and break bread together (modelling early Christians); facilitate interaction between parishioners in liturgical celebrations.

Help our people to value and better understand the distinctiveness and proper place of both personal/private devotions and Eucharistic celebrations.

Vary daily Mass times; make the Eucharistic prayers less wordy, more relevant; open churches more often. Offer existing and create new rituals: blessing a new home; marking a pregnancy, leaving home to study or to enter a nursing home; celebrate confirmation and baptism in mature teenage years; and celebrate the anniversary of confirmation and baptism.

Expand the community of those commissioned to celebrate the Sacraments.

Embrace modern technology (podcasts, apps, online resources<sup>7</sup>) to assist people to be more

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6. Enjoyable religious festivals, Catholic "expos" advertising the faith; movies promoting Christian values.

7. E.g., *The Furnace*, *Universalis*, *The Catholic Guy*.

contemplative and meditative and to contribute to their spiritual and mental health. Use social media to encourage prayer, rosary, retreats. *Can the Daily Office be live-streamed each day?*

### Divergent Views

Maintaining Tradition as paramount VERSUS Changes to Tradition to serve in the modern world. Value of beautiful, transcendent music that inspires the faithful VERSUS call to modernise music.

Calls for: i. *ad orientem* worship in the Sacred Liturgy (e.g., one such Mass celebrated each Sunday at a diocesan Cathedral) VERSUS Calls to go back to a truly vernacular liturgy; ii. The Novus Ordo is uninspiring and dull. VERSUS "Although I worship in the traditional Latin Mass, true synodality requires total respect for other Catholic traditions or forms of worship". The Church is wise to accept the celebration of Mass in different rites, so that we can all participate in the same crucial mission in ways that appeal to us.

Homilies should be clear, informative, and energising, and delivered by qualified men and women, as well as the clergy. VERSUS Other opportunities outside of Mass should be provided for qualified laity and clergy, to speak on important matters.

Allow marriages in settings other than churches. VERSUS Help people to understand the importance and value of marriage in a sacred Church building.

## PARTICIPATION

### V. AUTHORITY & PARTICIPATION

The Church should:

Continue to heed the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Light from the Southern Cross Report and the ACBC response to that report to facilitate a broader participatory governance model based on accountability and transparency at all levels; and use corporate lawyers to create a model that retains Vatican oversight but incorporates the accountability of bishops and is committed to using resources for the benefit of all.

Be a community of love and shared responsibility between all clergy and laity, where women are acknowledged as fully fledged adult Christians capable of assuming roles in governance.

Increase the presence of women in non-clerical leadership positions; tokenistic inclusion of women must cease; bishops should ensure that women are supported, trained and encouraged to pursue senior and other advisory, consultative and leadership roles at all levels.

Ensure women participate in all aspects of Church life. Their role in the Church and in the transmission of faith must be given due recognition. They constitute the majority of Mass attendees and organize most events but are not included in decision-making.

Develop a plan with timelines and targets to facilitate women's participation in Church as leaders and provide an annual, published report on progress through the appropriate agency.

Recognize and utilize female spiritual directors and theologians to promote and provide formation, spiritual guidance, and contemplative prayer within the Church.

Place a renewed focus on the primacy of the Baptismal calling as addressed in Vatican II, explaining its importance and essential character for Christians.

Find ways to empower those on "the fringes" to participate in and contribute to decision-making in the Church; and particularly prepare (Aboriginal) leaders to help them develop necessary skills to respond to their people's needs.

There is little evidence of synodality in the life of many parishes. Church and Synod are not synonymous, especially where there is no parish council. Parish councils are needed to: i. Empower the faithful's voice (e.g., to address gaps or deficiencies in parish ministry where they exist); ii. We must address the loss of sense of belonging and sense of being excluded by Church rules felt by some.

Given deep mistrust of the Plenary Council process among many of the faithful, bishops and priests must create opportunities for meaningful exchanges between clergy and the faithful if we are to encourage participation and "a fruitful experience of synodality at the local level".

Rebuild trust in clergy lost due to the Church's inadequate response to the sexual abuse crisis and to the damage it caused. Repair and rebuild Church culture and community, credibility, and reputation (e.g., via charitable works) to regain moral authority and encourage participation.

Bishops must be vigilant in prioritizing: their own relationship with God, the teaching of authentic Catholic faith, maintaining pastoral contact, seeking non-curial advice as appropriate.

## Obstacles, Challenges

A sense of intellectual superiority, the assumption of privilege and the misuse of power and authority by the clergy and those in executive positions in the Church are handicaps to participation, communication, and the spiritual growth of all.

Submissions indicate that the faithful baptized feel that: they are not recognized as equals who are "qualified to serve"; and they have no opportunity to use their gifts/talents to serve. Priests often resist delegating authority and where responsibility is given to laity, their decisions are often overturned. However, the faithful (men and women) believe they have a right to be involved in all ministries, including governance and liturgical leadership.

"Branch-stacking" has occurred in parishes where only lay people who support the "party line" are chosen; decision-making in parishes is often not transparent and mutual trust is lacking.

The "lack of inclusive religious imagery and language" has been acknowledged as one main barrier to women's participation in the Church (ACBC Report, 1995-99: "Woman and Man: One in Jesus Christ"). Attempts to provide inclusive language guidelines have

twice been discontinued. (In 2019 following an ACBC restructure, the Women's Council was abolished.)

### Implementation Suggestions

Increase the number of permanent deacons and ordain women as deacons.

ACBC to conduct a national review of governance and management structures in dioceses and parishes, re issues of transparency, accountability, consultation, lay men and women's roles.

Relieve bishops and priests of some administrative duties to enable them to focus more on prayer and pastoral ministry.

Consider the pastoral plans associated with the Movement for a Better World.

### Divergent Views

Governance does not need to be recast. Decisions can and should be made at a local level to support the Church's direction to be "the hands and feet of Christ" at the parish level. Only the Australian bishops should discern who is called to leadership positions in the Church.

Clergy should be representative of the wider community. Reconsider the necessity of priestly celibacy, the possibility of women's ordination and allowing married men to be priests. The Spirit's call to religious life and to married life are not necessarily exclusive, and there is not a hierarchy of callings. **VERSUS** Celibacy for priests is preferred unless priests feel called to marriage in which case celibacy should be optional.

Celibacy is not part of Aboriginal cultures. *Could the Church investigate giving Aboriginal men an exemption from the rule of celibacy for the diaconate or priesthood?*

Communicate magisterial teaching on women and their role in the Church, including questions of ordination, and problems of contemporary gender ideology **VERSUS** Magisterial teaching on women and their role in the Church precludes consideration of the ordination of women.

## VI. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

Address patriarchal power structures, legalism, and the culture of clericalism, which prevent people and communities from fully participating in discernment and decision-making.

The transformation of clerical control requires: i. Integrating the laity, especially women into the hierarchy; ii. Encouraging ordained clergy to adopt the signs, symbols and behaviours of servant leadership; iii. Recognizing the lived experience of laity and the capacity of well-educated (theologically, scripturally, spiritually, liturgically) laity to consult and advise.

Consider the possibility that an evangelizing Church is not seen as a loving Church.



Discernment together requires reconsidering our moral teaching on human sexuality, gender diversity and related issues in light of the best medical, psychological and sociological evidence.

### **Obstacles, Challenges**

The synodal process of discerning and deciding together is and will be disrupted by the lack of a process and willingness to deal respectfully and adeptly with differences in parishes and dioceses.

### **Implementation Suggestions**

Use the “See-Judge-Act” method as an essential parish strategy for personal and social transformation.

Reaffirm Vatican II’s idea of “the universal call to holiness” and daily prayer for all Catholics, not only for priests and religious.

## **VII. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY**

Formation for synodality requires preparedness of the clergy and laity for: deep listening, humility, vulnerability before others. The long, difficult journey toward a more synodal Church requires learning new skills, trusting one another, tolerating discomfort, building capacities.

The laity must move from passive reception of what clerics judge to be good for them to actively assuming responsibility, practising what is preached, without devaluing the distinct roles of clergy and religious in communities. Mutual trust is crucial if we are genuinely to journey together. Bishops must see the laity’s issues and priests’ issues as their own. Synodality can only exist when one person’s issues are everybody’s issues.

Priests and bishops must not be afraid to speak the truth and proclaim the faith.

Celebrate the mission of the baptized and focus on our mutual responsibility for evangelization.

Prioritize formation of lay leaders in Catholic institutions, which must reflect mission & the vitality of Catholic spiritual life.

Put in place processes for succession planning, identification of potential lay leaders, programs of mentoring and training for lay leaders, shared ministry with clergy. Shared ministry and parish management (rather than optional consultation) make a reality of journeying together.

### **Obstacles, Challenges**

The synodal journey is hindered by: a lack of moral compass, the patriarchal attitudes of some clergy, and a feeling of directionless among some laity. Abuse of power comes from a lack of accountability by the clergy, and a sense of entitlement.

With only short periods of discernment and without deep prayer, this synodal way of inclusion, listening with open hearts and minds, and discerning what the Spirit is saying through us could lead to an erosion of the understanding of the Church's teaching.

### Implementation Suggestions

Support priests and seminarians in the synodal journey by: providing innovative models of formation for leadership; educating them in the art of communication (public speaking) in developing mature interpersonal relationships, and managing change. Where possible, ensure that priests do not live alone; involve lay men and women in the formation of seminarians; develop a professional, well-funded program for enculturation of overseas priests undertaking extended ministry in Australia; require that all priests undertake regular pastoral supervision and intermittent appraisal; provide newly ordained priests with mentors.

Develop national standards and national training/accreditation processes for all areas of lay and clerical formation.

Every parish should have a governing council, including at least 3 lay people, one of whom is female; require cultural awareness training for parish staff and volunteers; hold parish assemblies every 5 years.

Men joining religious orders are formed in the spirit of their community. Diocesan seminarians should live as tertiary students do: working, studying, being part of and involved in a parish, learning to understand/communicate with those they will serve, rather than being "clericalized".

### Divergent Views

Lay men and women should be involved in decisions about senior diocesan appointments, placement of priests, admission of seminarians, and perhaps senior clergy appointments.

Priests should be able to apply to be parish priest in any diocese and be interviewed by parish representatives who recommend possible appointments to the bishop.

Bishops must exercise caution in relation to professional standards and similar secular categories in view of the tendency of these agencies to remove responsibility from the bishop.

## MISSION

### VIII. SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMON MISSION

The parish must provide a spiritual oasis to: challenge the deficit of interior life common today; make prayer and ongoing formation the central catalyst for renewal of mission; promote the "universal call to holiness"; recognise each person's unique role and responsibility in transforming the world; clearly connect social justice work to faith; support grassroots genesis of mission work; and encourage pastors to support authentic movements of the Holy Spirit.

Encourage believers' pride in the Church's good works and a view of themselves as both forgiven and called to completion in Christ. Invite them to engage in local social justice work.

Raise awareness of the value of the Church's good works to enhance communion, facilitate integration of services and projects, and help volunteers realise that they are appreciated.

Enhance mission activity by sharing resources and personnel between neighbouring parishes, city and country parishes, and between Australian and Oceania parishes.

Encourage all Catholics to be more apostolic and intentional about evangelising, focusing on the Holy Spirit and forming visible groups of Catholic followers of Jesus Christ.

### Obstacles, Challenges

Declining numbers of priests negatively impacts mission, while clericalization and professionalisation of the Church [tend] to create Catholic consumers of Church spirituality as opposed to active participants in mission.

Many, including members of the clergy, feel disenfranchised by the nature of the current Church leadership structure and culture.

### Implementation Suggestions

The Church must modernise to reach out to families by developing: i. More support centres in dioceses and deaneries to provide marriage counselling, spiritual formation to families and individuals, advice about faithfully living within the Judeo-Christian moral tradition; ii. Programs and opportunities to encourage intellectual growth and mutual fellowship among parishes and to attract lapsed Catholics back to the Church.

Mission demands more effective involvement in the public arena; encourage laity to organise to defend Christian values or lobby on specific issues. Focus on authentic witness, living the mission in a way that makes the Church relevant to modern living, not on maintaining the status quo.

The ACBC's election statements are useful in publicising the Catholic view of topical issues.

Do not retreat from environmental issues and the crisis of the Church's relevance, rather increase Catholic involvement, e.g., in environmental, Aboriginal, and healthcare issues.

### Divergent Views

See rising challenges to religious freedom as opportunities for re-evangelization; defend free speech and freedom to practice religion.

*In the "worst-case scenario" if we're no longer able to be true to our Catholic roots and employ staff or run Catholic schools and hospitals in accordance with our mission, what will we do?*

Examine necessity of the widespread practices of using instituted acolytes and female servers in parishes, which may be detrimental to priestly vocations.

## IX. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH & SOCIETY

The Church must: i. Improve its understanding of the social realities of life in Australia today, embrace the changing nature of people/families, engage with marginalised and disadvantaged groups to promote collaborative dialogue on important social issues, e.g., the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*; ii. Engage with a stronger, more authoritative voice on contentious issues and on the plight of the poor, marginalised, Aboriginal Australians, the disabled and their carers, refugees and those who experience same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria; and recognise the particular and divergent needs of these people.

Consider, accept, and embrace necessary change even where change upsets the status quo.

Use experts to promote, publicize and celebrate areas where the Church is effective in carrying out its mission to ensure that all sectors of society understand the value of the Church's involvement (e.g., in health and aged care).

### Obstacles, Challenges

The modes of dialogue in the Church do not adequately address our "social" sins: neglect of the Millenium Development Goals, cruelty to refugees and asylum seekers, unjust treatment of and failure to collaborate well with Aboriginal people, destruction of the environment by careless misuse of the earth's gifts. Doing so and taking seriously the lessons of *Laudato Si'* by helping people integrate them into their lives, would enhance dialogue with other sectors of society.

## X. ECUMENISM

To respond to Jesus' prayer that we might all be one, we must make a greater, hope-filled effort to journey together with other Christian Churches and to unite in public prayer together.

Despite few experiences of ecumenism in the Church, asking: "What can we learn from others?" is positive. Each of us must act rather than expect the Church or others to act. Our faith is not separate from that of other Christians so we must reach out to other Christians and work together to evangelize, support those in need.

### Implementation Suggestions

Ensure a proactive presence in civil life, e.g., on Anzac Day and at major national events, not only those that are clearly religious in nature.

Re-institute ecumenical initiatives like the "Good Friday Walk", at which people stopped to pray at all participating Christian Churches in Nth. Sydney.

Meet regularly with other faith groups and different organisations to collaboratively develop outreach programs for the vulnerable and needy in the community, to plan events and joint charitable initiatives.

## CONCLUSION

In summarising submissions to the Synod consultation process the responsibility of the Sydney Archdiocese Plenary Council and Synod Working Group was to truthfully record the views expressed in submissions. Contributors had been encouraged to pray, discuss and by the light of the Word of God invite the Holy Spirit to guide them in giving voice to what synodality implies for the mission of the Church today. We are grateful for their efforts to do so.

Readers will note that the views and perceptions expressed by the contributors within the document sometimes reflect: i. misunderstandings or misinterpretations of Church teaching; ii. lack of awareness of current initiatives being undertaken in the Archdiocese of Sydney, e.g., as in calls to “explain the liturgy” to parishioners; iii. an individual’s personal experiences of Church life; or iv. hopes for change that are inconsistent with or repudiate current Church law. For example, calls questioning the necessity of priestly celibacy, the possibility of women’s ordination as priests and deacons and allowing married men to be priests are included in the comments.

Nonetheless, the comments provide an opportunity for us to walk together as a Church to address misunderstandings and points of divergence as best we can under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with patience and in prayer and dialogue. The challenge ahead is to decide with the concept of synodality in our hearts and minds, how to take account of and respond to the voices of the contributors in this synthesizing report; as well as to the recommendations that will emerge from the second Plenary Council Assembly in the context of the Church’s mission.

The six key points or calls from the faithful emerging from this report are listed below. They are followed by potential ways in which to respond that are either explicitly contained within the report; or appear to be implied in the report as logical steps in a synodal path forward, lived out in the service of mission.



## 6 KEY POINTS EMERGING FROM SUBMISSIONS

1. Governance broadly conceived
2. Participation of women in the life of the Church
3. Enhanced pastoral support, spiritual formation, and pastoral supervision for bishops, priests, and seminarians
4. Formation of laity
5. Liturgical celebration and reform
6. Inclusive, Welcoming & Listening Church

## STEPS FORWARD

### 1. Governance

Undertake a review of current Church governance and management structures and practices in dioceses and parishes in response to calls for greater accountability and transparency. Ensure that parish and diocesan councils are established and that lay women and men have deliberative roles (and requisite training) in decision-making at all levels of governance. Investigate convictions that the Church's response to child sexual abuse is inadequate and explore ways to address harms caused to those who have suffered abuse, to repair damage to the moral authority of the Church and to rebuild trust in the Church.

### 2. Participation of women in the life of the Church

Institute a mechanism (e.g. an Office or Commission for Women) to investigate ways to increase women's role in decision-making, the transmission of faith and in leadership in the Church and develop a staged implementation plan to increase, support and develop respect for their participation.

### 3. Enhanced pastoral support, spiritual formation, and pastoral supervision for bishops, clergy, and seminarians.

Develop innovative, national models of formation and training for clergy and seminarians (in light of latest Vatican guidelines); and provide targeted capacity-building to enable them to be self-reflective, and to communicate and relate well pastorally to others. Require, and help clergy to understand the need to adhere to a regular schedule of pastoral supervision. Promote the training of pastoral supervisors.

#### **4. Formation of laity**

Consciously focus on developing spiritual “oases” in parishes; prioritize the spiritual formation of lay leaders; and encourage the practice of spiritual direction and facilitate the participation of female spiritual directors. Identify and develop training programs for small groups of people who appreciate the vitality of Catholic spiritual life; can respond innovatively to the varying needs of parishioners; and are willing to journey together and invite others to accompany them. Emphasize the baptismal call of the faithful and our mutual responsibility for evangelization.

#### **5. Liturgical celebration and reform:**

Undertake a review current liturgical practices to explore ways to revitalize liturgical celebration. In consultation with liturgical experts, prescribe the use of inclusive language and recommend diverse, innovative, and contemplative liturgical practices, including the embrace of Aboriginal spirituality. Use the Third Rite of Reconciliation as one among penitential rites appropriate to differing contexts.

#### **6. Inclusive, Welcoming & Listening Church**

Reinforce the foundational, synodal concept of the people of God as one people, which calls for the habitual enactment of Gospel values toward all human beings, especially those most vulnerable and in need. Publicize the good works of the Church and its mission; encourage pastoral councils to help facilitate service to those in need within their local communities.

The Plenary Council and Synod Working Group prays that the hopes articulated throughout the document will be fulfilled as well as possible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Synod of Bishops. We thank all those who have helped facilitate and participated in Synod Consultation Process, especially our parish ambassadors. We also express our gratitude for the support of Archbishop Anthony Fisher in making available to our team the resources that enabled our participation in this process.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

### Context

There are over 593,000 Catholics in the in the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, within a total population of 2,085,000. The Catholic population is 27.7% of the total within the geographical area. The Archdiocese includes 137 parishes, 1200 religious, and 516 priests.<sup>8</sup>

The Archdiocese of Sydney is the geographical diocese with the highest attendance rate (15.7%) and has a large Catholic population (594,145) making up 24.2 per cent of the total population. It has the highest percentage of any diocese of Catholics born in non-English-speaking countries (31.4%), and the second highest percentage, after the Diocese of Broken Bay, of adult Catholics with a university degree (27.3%). Its Catholic population is relatively stable, residentially speaking, with 57.9 per cent living at the same address for both the 2011 and the 2016 Censuses. (NCPR Mass Attendance Report, 2016, p. 9)

#### A SNAPSHOT OF THE DIOCESE (2016)

Total Population: 2,455,169

Catholic Population: 594,145

Catholics make up 24.2 per cent of the total population

Median age of Catholics is 38 years

Total Catholic families: 204,898

51,701 Catholics live alone

218,137 Catholics were born overseas

36,059 Catholics do not speak English well

36,027 Catholics need assistance with core activities

166,112 Catholics have changed address since 2011

*Archdiocese of Sydney*

*National Catholic Census Project 1991-2016*

*Principal source of data: Australian Bureau of  
Statistics—2016 Census of Population and Housing*

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8. <https://www.sydneycatholic.org/about-us/> Accessed 26th April 2022.

## APPENDIX 2

### Voices Of the Faithful – Selected Quotations from Individual Submissions

#### Communion

##### I. Companions On The Journey

We, as a church, must encourage, inspire & give voice to young people so that they might have ownership over their faith. The Church must be careful to ensure that it is not simply listening to and supporting traditionalist youth; the currently disengaged have a faith and a life's experience which must be sought out. Those who are supposed to lead and serve the Church are not keeping up with the culture of our time and they are missing a great opportunity to reach out to young people.

"Included" and "welcomed" do not have the same meaning....It is unfortunate that "*inclusive*" has not been defined; ...according to the dictionary means to be embraced, be involved with, incorporated into the Body of Christ."

A FEW FEET: A BRAVE GRAVE: Inspiring Mary of the Cross, inspire us as we walk this plenary path. You feared not. You lived truth confronting power, the intoxicated power of hierarchy. Clericalism did not bend you or break you. You demonstrated inclusion in faith and education. We yearn for an inclusive church in Australia. Dogma, doctrine, Canon law and discipline cannot replace the lived example of Christ specially created for our time and place. An example: we reject the fear which rejects the gay, lesbian, divorced, committed unmarried, atheist, intelligent doubters. They are all yours Oh God and must equally be ours, especially the young. We love and welcome them as authentic brothers and sisters. Let's show it by living it. We enthuse the gifts of your spirit. Silly barriers created by collared men of past ages must give way for the fulfilment of your love. In You, we are one and connected with all and creation; the periphery of Pope Francis beckons, indeed demands our focus. All gifts set free! The face of the Church must be seen in the poor and vulnerable, the works of social justice, in peace and in caring for our common home. Change is God made; to be embraced; joyful enthusiasm. Preparing the way of the Lord. The Plenary Path falters; Synodal suspicion and exhaustion. Where is the courage of bishops and religious orders to share their authentic beliefs; their contribution brave to the *sensus fidelium*. Why would the Spirit turn up in their vulnerable absence? Their silence is deafening; of fear? "Do not be afraid I am with you". Should we press the pause button? Oh for the courage of Gallipoli Gilroy who silenced the Clericalist Curial Cardinal at Vatican II; "Pull the plug his time is up". Indeed. (Individual submission to PCWG Sydney Archdiocese.)

## II. Listening

My submission asks only one thing, that the Australian bishops listen honestly and respectfully to the voice of the Catholic laity. During the Plenary Council process the laity's requests regarding issues such as women's greater participation in ministry, the welcoming of divorced and remarried Catholics back to Holy Communion, and a less judgemental attitude towards gay people were all totally ignored. There was not one mention of any of these issues in the final agenda, even though, after reading the 300-page summary of the original submissions, it was obvious that these issues were constantly recurring themes.

My fear, and the fear of many Australian Catholics, is that the same thing will happen during the Synod on Synodality process, that the submissions will be manipulated in such a way that what is sent to Rome is not reflective of the Australian Church, but only reflective of the bishops' views. (NCPR Archdiocese of Sydney Report on Submissions, 2022, p.9)

The fact that there is no real means by which the individual or group can voice their opinion in a safe and caring environment severely impacts on the involvement of most individuals and community groups. This is a major hurdle for young people and those from ethnically diverse communities where the very language used, such as that used in the Plenary process, immediately alienates and limits involvement.

In the words 'listen' and 'silent' the same letters are used but in a different sequence. So, in order to listen [to all around us] and thus hear, one must silence the mind in order to truly hear.

Where do we find empathy in a male dominated clergy that does not trust the people crying out to be heard and treats any question as an attack on their authority? We want our Church to fulfil its great promise, to be a community of trusting love.

Many complaints have been submitted to the Archdiocese, but it seems no one is listening to the voice of parishioners.

## III. Speaking Out

Domestic violence is an important societal issue but in my 79 years I have never heard a homily on it.

## IV. Celebration

Bishops should create a working party to develop a better translation of the Eucharistic prayers and to explore other rites and rituals to ensure that they are appropriate to their people, as directed by Pope Francis in the *Motu Proprio*, Sept 9, 2017.

More basic liturgical and theological training for lay people is needed. Adults in pews need mature formation in faith and Scripture.



A Council of Australian Catholic Women was established by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference as a response to the "Woman and Man" Report. Around 2015 this Council began another attempt to provide Inclusive Language Guidelines for use in the liturgy and life of the Catholic Church in Australia. When the Bishops' Conference was restructured in 2019 the Women's Council was abolished. So, the project again came to an abrupt end. (NCPR Archdiocese of Sydney Report on Submissions, 2022, pp. 12-13)

One of the main issues that has been at the forefront of reflection is the very obvious and vicious attack on the traditions of the Church, in particular the Tridentine Mass and sacraments. While the numbers in *Novus Ordo* parishes are declining, the sudden surge towards more traditional parishes and orders is something that cannot be ignored. These traditional practices are tried and true, they sustained the church for 100's of years and cultivated thousands upon thousands of great saints. My experience in *Novus Ordo* settings is similar to that which many have expressed, that not only is the liturgy somewhat uninspiring and dull, but the clergy in those parishes have a tendency to leave the laity wanting and needing more. The spiritual starvation that comes from a majority of these parishes is of grave concern and could be an explanation as to the great decline in overall belief in the Catholic faith. ... I ask you Bishops to please pray on this matter and to look at the fruits of traditional liturgies and worship. How beneficial it has been for not only myself but countless other people who feel like refugees from the *Novus Ordo*, seeking a place of safety in the Traditional Latin Mass. Please allow us faithful to have access to these things which we hold so dear. (NCPR Archdiocese of Sydney Report on Submissions, 2022, p.27)

## V. Implementation Suggestions

Open churches for contemplative prayer and Adoration; hold bible study and devotional prayer group meetings in parishes; devote a homily (each month) to explaining parts of the Mass; celebrate children's masses and liturgies, and use meditative and other forms of prayer, including *Lectio Divina*; establish a national program of regular meditation sessions with the option to participate in person or online; hold day and weekend retreats to encourage reflection on our relationship with God and the Church; schedule opportunities for prayer/reflection within traditional Catholic practices (e.g. rosary before/after Mass); produce a standard Catholic Family Prayer Book; specifically focus on resources for parents to teach kids how to pray; use methods of Ignatian spirituality; explain the catechism or run workshops to teach spiritual exercises; start a parish library; ensure dioceses make resources available online or in hard-copy; celebrate grandparents day. (Précis of Responses to the Agenda of the Fifth Plenary Council, Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, 2021, p.9.)

## Participation

### VI. Authority & Participation

#### Women's Participation

Women, as mothers, teachers, and principal carers are and always have been the most significant teachers of Christ's message within the family. They are at the coalface and are key to the most relevant and trusted relationships. So, why does the Church not listen to them and fully accept their leadership?

[A]ctively work to give women a greater role in Church decision-making and in pastoral/ministry roles. Women's service, mostly unseen and unrecognized must be a top priority.

I long for a Church in which I am not a second-class citizen, a Church which will allow women an equal calling to priesthood.

Early in the Plenary Council process there was nothing on the Archdiocesan website. Just a message to say go their [the Plenary Council] website.... The silence here [in Sydney] is killing the Church."

### VII. Discerning And Deciding

My family and I believe that this whole synod is unnecessary and ultimately works against the one true Church. People should be encouraged to come back to the Church but on the rules set by Christ himself - not adapting to everyone's needs, particularly those living in serious mortal sin who expect the Church to change. Christ does not change. A sad day to see so many Bishops and priests opposing Christ. Get back to basics. Defend the Church and its teachings. If people want to live in sin that is their choice, and the Church should be pointing out to them the serious risks in which they place their souls - not try and give a blessing to their sinful way of life. (NCPR Archdiocese of Sydney Report on Submissions, 2022, p.36.)

### VIII. Forming Ourselves In Synodality

Trinity calls us to equality in relationships, not a pyramidal and clericalist Church. In Australia, churches will be empty unless there is a real commitment to change in governance, in patriarchal attitudes.

In the interests of child safety and improved institutional responses to child sexual abuse, the ACBC should request the Holy See to: publish criteria for the selection of bishops (include promotion of child safety) and establish a transparent process for appointing bishops (include direct participation of lay people.) - Royal Commission Recommendation 16.8

Strong and influential groups within and outside the Church have been lobbying for some time for a more human *modus operandi* for the Church; these groups, and influential Catholics seek reform that is in contradiction of settled Catholic doctrine. This is a cause of much confusion and further undermines the trust that everyday faithful have in the Church.... While I support Pope Francis' call for a synodal church, I see the whole project as being railroaded in Australia by groups like "Catholics for Renewal" and influential individuals and some Bishops. Rather than ask what our "dream" is for the Church (sounds rather like a pie in the sky), why not simply ask, "How could improvements be made in the way the Church carries out its functions, within the parameters of its Tradition and teachings?" To dream about something is to consider the fanciful; this would no doubt be the catalogue of wants desired by some, so that the Church becomes more aligned and imbued with the ways-of-the-world. This would not be the Church founded by Christ and the apostles. (NCPR Archdiocese of Sydney Report on Submissions, 2022, p.36.)

Until the Catholic Church can preach "the Joy of the Gospel" in the way that Jesus would to the people of the 21st Century - not rules, exclusions ("Thou shalt nots") - people will stay away from the Church.

Today I attended an event at the Sydney Opera House. It was a series of talks attended by thousands of people. During the course of a talk from an internationally renowned professor, the professor recalled how, in their childhood, they couldn't understand why the things being taught in Sunday School were not reflected in the actions of the Church. The audience laughed. The audience knew exactly what this professor meant. As a Religious Education teacher in a Secondary School, I am often asked excellent questions by enthusiastic young Catholics. It's getting harder to be Catholic when there is a disconnect between the loving God of the Gospels and a judgemental God of Church practice. These young people will likely also come to think of the Church as a joke. Gone is the era of an acceptance of being told what to do. In the light of the sins visited on children by ordained ministers of the Church, a Church which presumes to dictate instead of nurture; to legislate to exclude rather than mirror the inclusion shown by Jesus; will be laughed at. If we truly believe the accounts of Jesus in the Gospels, why does the Church have such extraordinary material wealth? Why are some people deemed more 'worthy' of God's love than others? The Catholic Church has the opportunity to bring the joy of a loving God to a turbulent world, or the biased decision-makers can vote to maintain their power and to become a laughingstock. (NCPR Archdiocese of Sydney Report on Submissions, 2022, p.25)

Apologise for your failures, reach out to those you have alienated and develop a plan in consultation with them for the Church in Australia to respond to her 21st Century needs.

# MISSION

## IX. Sharing Responsibility For Our Common Mission

Parishes should ensure that they are reaching out to the marginalised in their community, accompanying and assisting in any way they can.

Outreach and inclusion of people with disabilities, people with same sex attraction, and young couples needs to be a focus for the mission of the Church.

Given that ... the divide between the have and have-nots, the rich and poor, is broadening, God is asking us to actively engage to show our love for the less well off.

## X. Dialogue In Church & Society

My family and I believe that this whole synod is unnecessary and ultimately works against the one true Church. People should be encouraged to come back to the Church but on the rules set by Christ himself - not adapting to everyone's needs, particularly those living in serious mortal sin who expect the Church to change. Christ does not change. A sad day to see so many Bishops and priests opposing Christ. Get back to basics. Defend the Church and its teachings. If people want to live in sin that is their choice, and the Church should be pointing out to them the serious risks in which they place their souls - not try and give a blessing to their sinful way of life. (NCPR Archdiocese of Sydney Report on Submissions, 2022, p.36.)

**Support research** into religion and development to enable assessment of the Church's work internationally, e.g., regarding healthcare work in the global South, to ensure positive health and religious literacy outcomes.

## XI. Ecumenism

...if we evangelise with the love of God and with an open heart, allow the Sacraments to speak for themselves and listen to the hearts of youth as Pope Francis advocates, we will evangelise and have cohesion between churches not through merits of our own but through being vessels for the Holy Spirit to pave the way. Being a disciple and listening as Christ listened to the troubles of His people. That is how we build the Church. (NCPR Archdiocese of Sydney Report on Submissions, 2022, p.34)

## APPENDIX 3

### Resources

Resources produced by the PCWG for the Plenary Council and Synod.

*A Church on Mission: Synodality and Discipleship  
within the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney*

<https://youtu.be/r2OmKXv-qKg>

*Prayerful Reflections – Towards Plenary Council 2021*

Bishop Terry Brady

<https://youtu.be/ka8vKZOTaIM>

*What is God Asking of Us?*

Stephen Noone

<https://youtu.be/IABvSQGMEVM>

*What is God Asking of Us in prayer?*

Dr Sandra Lynch

<https://youtu.be/IW-F4Gxjxe0>



