

Good afternoon. It's an honour to share with you our experience from the Archdiocese of Adelaide. What I'm about to share is the work of a wider team of people, some of whom are at this conference this week.

1) Contextually Aware

Over the past 3 years, part of my job has been to coordinate our Diocesan Assemblies. When Archbishop Pat arrived in May 2020, he asked how we were preparing for the Plenary Council. You may recall (pre-pandemic) that Adelaide was to host the first session of the Plenary Council – so you would think that people would have been highly engaged. However, the diocese had been a bit rudderless for some time. Our previous Archbishop, Philip Wilson, was caught up in a long legal dispute which led to his resignation. Even under a good administrator, this saga affected the morale of the entire diocese. Beyond the initial work of listening and dialogue, preparing our people for the Council was not top of mind. It's not that nothing was happening, it's just that everyone was doing their own thing.

So, when Archbishop Pat asked us to hold a Diocesan Assembly in 2021 to not only prepare for the Plenary Council, but also to begin to discern the needs and priorities of the Archdiocese, it gave us new energy and focus – a united re-engagement with mission.

2) Vision-minded

We knew from the outset that this could not be a 'one-off' assembly. Instead, we wanted to kickstart the Archdiocese into a new era of synodality in which assembling, listening, dialogue and discernment were a regular fixture. We also knew then that this way of being church would lead our people into becoming missionary disciples – but that we also needed to learn how to do it in a way that worked for us in Adelaide.

3) Mutual / Dialogical / Collaborative

We put together a steering committee and developed a communication and consultation plan. We not only needed to introduce the concept of a Diocesan Assembly, we needed to know what issues and topics were important to people. So, we asked a very simple question, *"What do you think we should talk about at the Diocesan Assembly?"*

We received almost 1600 responses, and they told us a great deal about the needs, hopes and dreams of our people. We categorized the responses into six themes:

On screen – don't read

- Leadership and Leadership Formation
- Faith Formation and Spiritual Development
- Healing and Inclusion
- A Church that listens and responds to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor
- Community Life and Worship
- Accompaniment and Outreach of Children, Families and Young People

Which formed the discussion and discernment groups of our 2021 and 2022 Assemblies. They would also eventually form the framework of our Diocesan Pastoral Services Team.

However, something we discovered through the consultation and 2021 Assembly was that being an outward-facing, mission-oriented church was not an apparent priority of the people in parishes, communities and schools – let alone diocesan agencies!

At the 2021 Assembly we asked the discernment groups to put forward recommendations for consideration – they put forward 255 recommendations! Many of these addressed internal matters. Parish leadership, communication between the diocese and parishes, who could / should be ordained, sacramental preparation resources and so on. You could probably name all of the things people want to fix! They are all important, but very few people were looking beyond the stained-glass windows into their neighbourhoods or the wider world.

4) Focused and Strategic

We realized that the next Diocesan Assembly needed to focus on mission.

We tasked every parish, school and community to look at the 255 recommendations and choose three the Archdiocese should prioritise and three for their own community.

Almost 1800 people participated in the discernment processes from most of our parishes, schools and communities. It's true, not everyone is on board with this way of being church. But we don't stop inviting them into the process and the mission.

This feedback did two things: 1) It provided direction to Diocesan Leadership, including the new Diocesan Pastoral Council and Pastoral Services Team. 2) It gave parishes, schools and communities an opportunity to engage more people in

the discernment for mission, and to think about their part in the bigger picture. That is to say, as we participated, we were being formed.

We didn't explicitly say, "we are forming you for mission" at the 2022 Diocesan Assembly, but we did try to give the participants an experience of formation.

- We explored the primacy of baptism and the universal call to participation, communion and mission through dynamic liturgies, workshops and discussion groups, and other interactions.
- We presented a vision of a Church on the move, one that seeks to include, listen, discern and respond in missionary action by providing an experience of a Church that is inclusive, listening, discerning and responsive.
- We offered opportunities for theological formation, learning from the experiences of reflective practitioners, and time for collaborative strategic planning.

The Assembly concluded with an opportunity for participants to make a commitment to action. Each person wrote down one thing they would do in the next 12 months further the mission of God in their community.

Has it been perfect. No. Are we finished? Not even close.

But, we heard participants say things like, 'I get it now – we can't wait on the Archdiocese, or Father to do everything – I have some responsibility in this too.' 'I am part of the mission.' 'We can do this.' 'I need to do a better job at including lay people in making decisions and ministering in the parish.'

5) Subsidiarity

To help localize all of this, we initiated Regional Assemblies for 2023. We created nine geographic regions and asked the parishes, schools and communities in those regions to come together to look at their shared realities, the needs of the world around them, and to begin to discern ways they could collaborate and work together for the common good in church and society. Members of our Pastoral Services Team have been assigned to each region and are accompanying the coordination teams to plan and facilitate their assemblies. Over the next 12 months, people in every corner of our diocese will have the opportunity to engage in this movement of formation for mission and ministry, and to be a church that is truly *Together on the Way*.

For our part, we've started to develop responses, programs, resources and support services to assist parishes, schools and communities – and this has me really excited about where we are headed.

The good thing is, we're not done yet, and we're only getting started!