



Letter on Synodality and the new Diocesan Governance Framework for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

**From Bishop Michael Kennedy
23 September 2025**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For many years, the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle has been deeply committed to walking together in faith, prayer, and shared discernment. This commitment is at the heart of *synodality*, a way of being Church in which all members of the Church – clergy, religious, and laity – participate in discernment and dialogue, guided by the Holy Spirit. As Pope Francis used to remind us, this is not in the mode of a parliament, but as a communion of God's people who discern what God is asking of us, listening to the Holy Spirit by listening to one another.

This present letter will focus on the revision of our Diocesan Governance Framework, which is part of what the Church refers to as *Structures of Participation*. The various advisory boards and councils that will make up our new governance structure will operate in a synodal mode. But first we need to acknowledge that synodality occurs at several levels in our Diocesan community.

From our landmark 1992 Diocesan Synod, to parish assemblies, pastoral councils, and community consultations, we in Maitland-Newcastle have long sought to shape our mission through genuine participation and collaboration. This approach has guided parish initiatives, Diocesan pastoral planning, and our engagement with the Catholic Church overall, including Australia's recent Plenary Council and the Universal Church's *Synod on Synodality*.

Our Diocese aims to be Synodal in all we do. Specifically, this can be identified at four levels:

1. Universal Church

We participate in the universal synodal process. I have recently given the Director of our Mission and Evangelisation Team the responsibility for coordinating our diocesan participation in the universal synodal process initiated by Pope Francis and now led by Pope Leo XIV. The Mission and Evangelisation team will coordinate our involvement in the pathway for the implementation of the synod¹.

2. Our Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

For almost 40 years our Diocese has engaged in the pastoral planning cycle. As Pope Saint John Paul II explained,

“It is not therefore a matter of inventing a “new programme”. The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself... This programme for all times is our programme for the Third Millennium. But it must be translated into pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community.”

Following the death of Bishop Bill Wright in 2021, this process was paused. It will soon restart with the appointment of a new Diocesan Pastoral Council. We will be seeking expressions of interest for membership of this important council later this year. The pastoral planning cycle allows significant synodal engagement in the future direction of the Diocese.² The Council's initial task will be to bring to completion our local synod which was interrupted by Bishop Bill's untimely death. This will be a significant milestone in our synodal journey, but not its conclusion – the synodal journey is ever ongoing.

3. Our Parishes

Each parish also applies the pastoral planning cycle in developing pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community. I am heartened that so many of our parishes conduct regular parish assemblies which are integral to this. It is intended that the 2025 revised statutes for parish pastoral and finance councils will assist.

4. The Diocesan Curia

The Diocesan Curia are those agencies and offices that assist the bishop in overseeing the life and mission of the Diocese. The structure of the Diocesan Curia needs to reflect and actively engage the ‘Structures of Participation’³ because,

“These structures guarantee a dimension of communion in the pastoral governance of the Bishop, insofar as they generate a kind of reciprocal interplay between what a Bishop is called to contribute to the good of the diocese through exercising his personal responsibility, and the contribution made through the collaboration of all the faithful.”

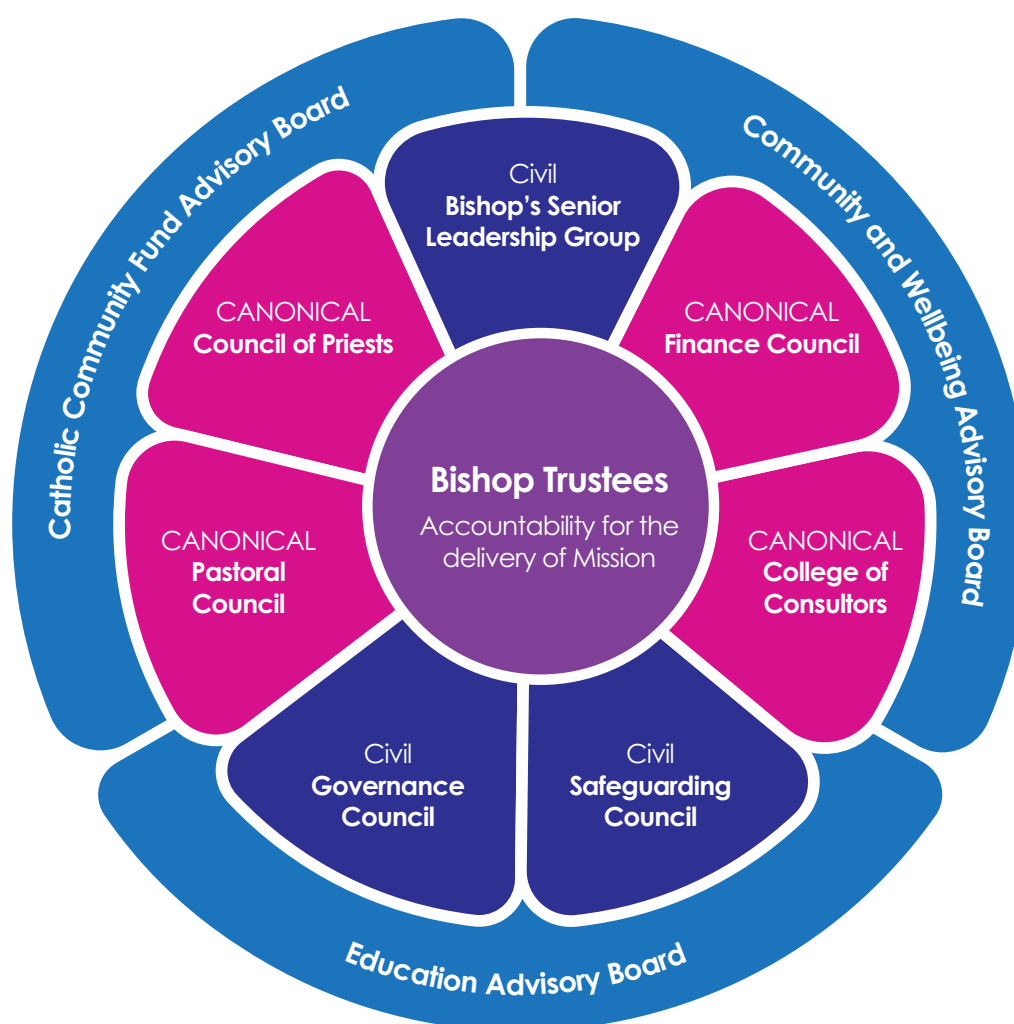
The governance of the bishop's role has to be **constitutional**, follow the laws and customs of our Church, and be **consultative** (Synodal); hearing those who need to be heard before decisions are made which in some instances also requires receiving consent before acting.

New Diocesan Governance Framework

In this synodal spirit we are embarking on a revised governance framework (structures of participation) for our Diocese. It will include advisory groups which bring together the wisdom, gifts, and experience of our Catholic community. These groups will help guide the Diocese in important areas of mission, pastoral care, and administration, ensuring that our decisions are prayerful, transparent, and informed by the lived reality of our people.

These new advisory groups will adopt synodal working methods. This will include engaging in respectful dialogue, thoughtful discernment, and robust discussion where needed, all while remaining faithful to the teaching and mission of the Church. Each advisory group will be heard in its area of expertise and provide advice to the Bishop and Diocesan Trustees for critical discernment. This is one more way in which our Diocese is living out its synodal journey in practice. You can see a visual representation of our Synodal Governance Structure below.

Synodal Representation of the Governance Structure of the Diocese



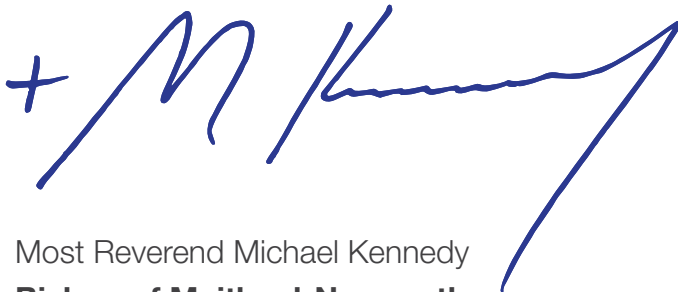
In the coming months we will invite expressions of interest from those who feel called to contribute their insight, skills, and experience as members of these advisory boards and councils.

Whether your background is in pastoral life, education, social services, finance, governance, community leadership, or good plain common-sense problem solving and decision making, your perspective can help us faithfully serve our communities into the future.

More detailed information about the advisory groups, their scope, and their membership will be available soon on the Diocese website. I will alert you when this occurs

I thank you for your ongoing commitment to the life and mission of our Diocese. Together, guided by the Holy Spirit, we will continue our journey as a local Church, faithful to the Lord and focussed on synodal listening, focussed on our communion in faith and love, and focussed on our mission to spread the Gospel.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized cross followed by the letters 'M' and 'K' and a long horizontal stroke.

Most Reverend Michael Kennedy
Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle

FOOTNOTES

1. <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/process/implementation/pathways/250102---ENG-Pathways-for-the-implementation-phase.pdf>
2. See overview on page iv <https://diocesemn.azurewebsites.net/media/1053/moving-forward-together-diocesanpastoralplan250810.pdf>
3. See paragraph 165, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cbishops/documents/rc_con_cbishops_doc_20040222_apostolorum-successores_en.html

