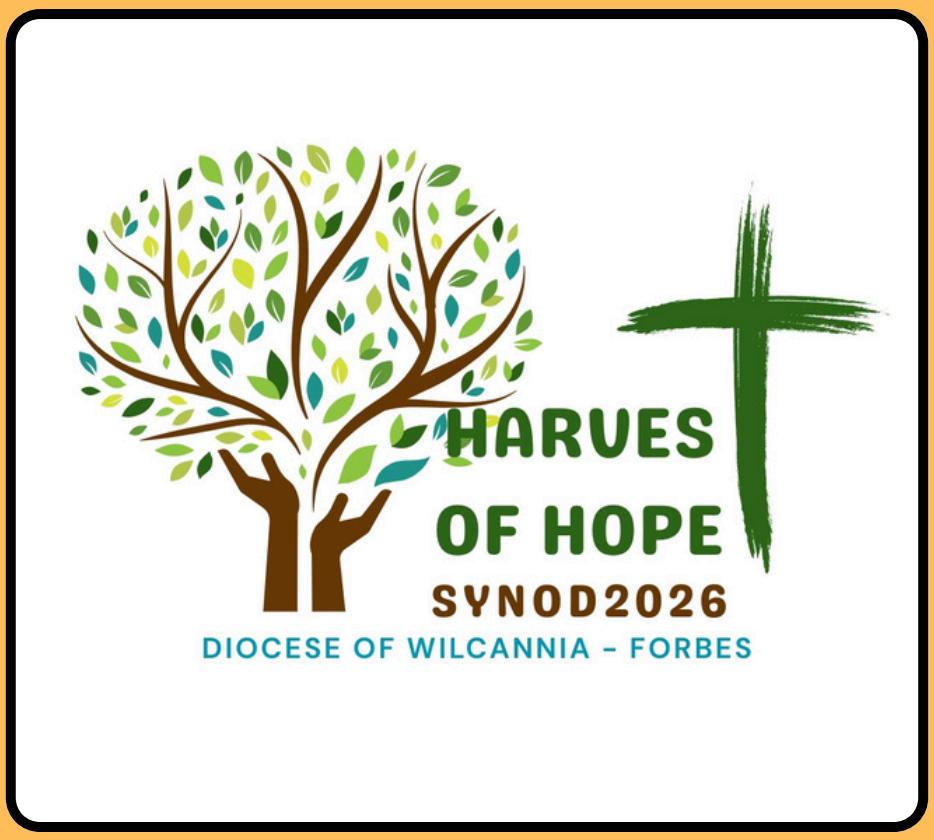
Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes

Synod Report



Contents: Bishop's Columba's Pastoral Letter, Our Diocesan Synod Journey, Synod Members, Introduction to the Priorities and Recommendations, Four Priorities and Recommendations, Synod Moments, What Comes Next?

30 Sep - 2 Oct 2026



Harvest of Hope:
A Pastoral Letter Following Our Synod

My dear friends in Christ,

Now that our Synod has concluded and we have returned to our homes, parishes and paddocks, I want to write to you not first as your bishop, but as a fellow pilgrim who has been deeply moved by these days.

Thank you. To everyone who travelled long roads to be with us, to those who prepared so carefully, and to every person who sat at a kitchen table or in a church hall and shared what brings them joy in their faith: you were heard, and you have blessed me more than you know.

Years ago, a wise man from Louth named Wally told me that out here, faith is not a Sunday decoration; it is what gets people through. I have seen the truth of that again and again. I have sat in your kitchens in the dry years when the dams had turned to cracked mud, and prayed the psalms of lament with you when there seemed no other answer. I have seen you carry one another through flood, through the loneliness of the pandemic, and through long seasons of uncertainty about the future of our diocese.

Through it all, you kept the doors open. You led prayer when no priest could come, visited the sick, taught the children and cared for your churches. Our forebears once placed a priest's stole on an empty chair to remind them to pray for vocations. That same quiet, faithful hope lives in you still.

Our Synod gathered everything you shared under the call to Spiritual Renewal. We spoke about staying connected as one family across great distances; about our schools and parishes walking together; about reaching out to those who are struggling, walking with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters, and welcoming the many cultures among us, including our priests who have come so far to serve; and about nurturing our young people, praying for vocations and sharing the life of the Church together.

am now taking time to pray with all that was said, and I ask you to pray with me. In the coming months I will write again to share where I believe the Spirit is leading us.

St Paul reminds us: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." We cannot make it rain. But anyone who has lived out here knows that after even the longest drought, the rain does come, and paddocks that looked dead turn green again. The seed was there all along.

I believe the seed of faith is in this diocese still: in the grandmother who never misses her Rosary, in the teacher who prays with a frightened child, in the young person who asks for Confirmation against the tide, and in the missionary priest who learns to say "G'day" and means it.

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, let us keep walking together, our hearts burning within us, trusting that the Lord walks beside us.

May Our Lady of Perpetual Help, patroness of our diocese, keep you and your families in her loving care.

With my prayers and gratitude,



Most Rev. Columba Macbeth-Green OSPPE Bishop of Wilcannia-Forbes

Our Diocesan Synod Journey

Bishop Columba convoked this Synod in his Easter message of 2025. From then, the diocese engaged in a listening exercise, starting with a Survey asking about the joys, challenges and suggestions for Catholic life in our parishes and diocese. Over 250 people gave their responses, from parishioners to workers in Catholic agencies. This was followed by three face-to-face Deanery Gatherings in 2026, which used spiritual conversations to reflect on ‘10 years on - Survive? Thrive?’ These processes led to the Synod Working Document. Then, while Small Group Gatherings followed up local discernment, the emerging Recommendations were workshopped through further surveys and Zoom sessions with those interested or involved in each Priority area, as well as with our canonical and theological advisors. At the Synod itself, Members gathered from across our diocese to pray, discern, vote, celebrate and be inspired in God’s mission.



Synod Members



The **Harvest of Hope** Synod brought together 81 people, which included:

- Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green
- Synod Facilitator Qwayne Guevara
- 17 priests working in the diocese
- Representatives from parishes in every deanery
- Catholic parish schools; Catholic Education Wilcannia-Forbes; Red Bend Catholic College
- Catholic Care Wilcannia-Forbes
- Members of Catholic ministries and organisations such as St Vincent de Paul, prayer groups and faith formation committees
- Chancery staff
- 2 Observers - from a neighbouring diocese and the local Uniting Church.

Introduction to Harvest of Hope Priorities and Recommendations

The Synod is one step on the larger spiritual journey that we, in the Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes, are walking together. The gathering was not a conclusion, and does not solve all problems, but it will nourish us and give us strength to grow. In all of the processes leading towards the Synod, we have attempted to listen to the "joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties" of our people in our time (Gaudium et Spes, #1). So many beautiful expressions of faith and community emerged in answer to the question 'In your experience of Catholic life, what brings you joy?' However, there were also genuine fears and challenges, including those of spiritual crisis, relevance, public face, inward focus, accountability, voicelessness, isolation, lack of connection, participation and parish/diocesan existence.

The below priorities can all be summed up as 'Spiritual Renewal'. We turn to Jesus Christ as our eternal Saviour and Guide. As people of hope, we believe that God has a harvest of faith far beyond any of us could ask or imagine. Indeed, as St Paul says, while some plant seeds and others water them, it is God who provides the growth (1 Cor 3:6-7). We have been cultivated in a faith-filled past, and we will flourish in a faith-filled future. Yet each one of us has an important part to play as workers in God's paddock. Our efforts for God's mission encourage and strengthen our faith and that of others.

Therefore, below are the four Priorities that were discerned through our synodal process. Each Recommendation to the Bishop was passed by a two-thirds majority at the Synod itself. Small table groups then discerned how these Recommendations could best be implemented, which actions were most important and who could be involved at personal, local and diocesan levels. What the Holy Spirit highlighted in this process will be further developed following the Synod (see 'What comes next?') We continue to call on the guidance of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. In gratitude, pray for us.

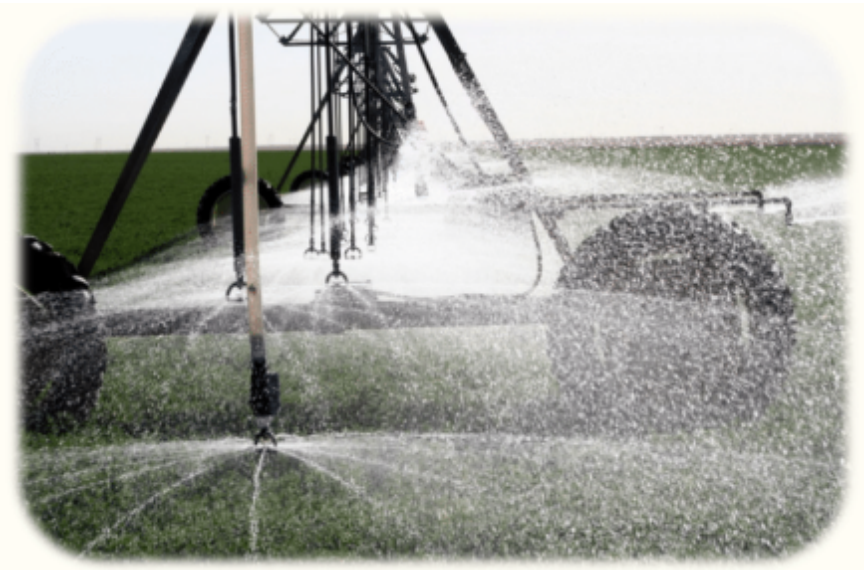
Harvest of Hope: Between the Branches and the Roots
Priority 1: Communications, Finance and Governance



We discerned and we voted on these Recommendations to the Bishop:

1. Enable Communications Across the Diocese. Invest in and equip communications personnel and media to deliver regular, relevant, and relational updates across the Diocese, making communication a ministry worthy of proper support.
2. Enhance Financial Accountability. Cultivate a culture of financial accountability at both the diocesan and parish level — where members are genuine stakeholders, reporting is open, and processes are clear and accessible.
3. Foster the Growth of Pastoral Councils. Within the existing structures for discernment and governance, identify what is working and strengthen what is not, so that dialogue and consultative decision-making become more effective and enduring across the Diocese.

Harvest of Hope: Watering the Crop
Priority 2: Catholic Education, School/Parish, Formation



We discerned and we voted on these Recommendations to the Bishop:

1. Build Capacity amongst Catholic Educators. The Catholic Education Office, Red Bend Catholic College and parishes deepen their commitment to resourcing, supporting, and forming Catholic educators as witnesses of faith.
2. Strengthen the School-Parish Partnership. Catholic schools and parishes commit to regular, structured opportunities for collaboration — sharing vision, deepening communication, and embracing their common identity as one community of faith, forming the next generation together.
3. Build the Culture of Formation. Diocese to empower parishes in offering accessible pathways so that faith formation opportunities are available for everyone.

Harvest of Hope: Producing Fruit
Priority 3: Outreach, Mission and Valuing Cultures



We discerned and we voted on these Recommendations to the Bishop:

1. Reach out in Service and Mission. Provide avenues to better serve Christ in those who are suffering in our diocese and promote the mission of Christ together.
2. Grow in Relationship with First Nations Peoples. Establish a formal, ongoing process of genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the Diocese.
3. Empower our Catholic cultural communities. Diocese to create pathways for representation, involving cultural communities in diocesan and parish life.

Harvest of Hope: Replenishing the Soil
Priority 4: Youth, Vocations and Co-Responsibility



We discerned and we voted on these Recommendations to the Bishop:

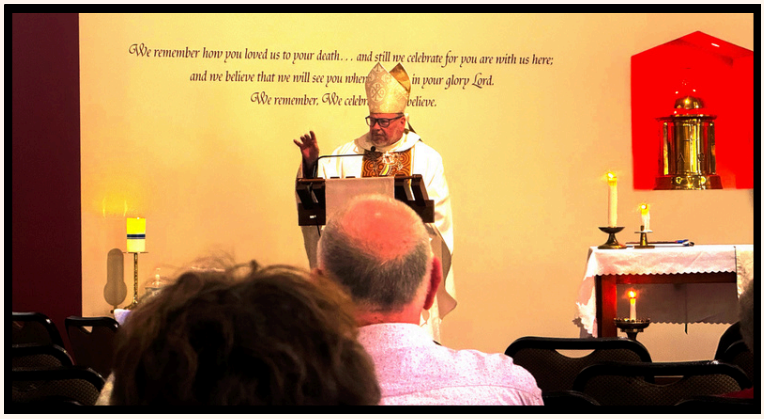
1. Reignite Diocesan Youth Ministry. Diocese to create vibrant spaces where young people are formed and supported to grow in faith and community.
2. Call Forth and Nurture Vocations. Resource every parish, school, and Catholic community to identify, invite, and accompany those among their people who show gifts for ordained and lay ministry.
3. Build Genuine Co-Responsibility. The Diocese to form and resource clergy, lay women and men, for ministry and servant leadership roles — empowering a genuine share in responsibility across every level of Church life.

Synod Moments



Left: A beautiful Welcome to Country from the local Catholic Wiradjuri community.

Right: Bishop Columba at the Opening Mass



Below: Synod Members gathering in their small groups



Below: Entertainment night - the ‘synodality dance’ (left) and Fr Oche on guitar (right)





Synod Moments

Right: The youngest (17) and the oldest (95) Synod Members





Left and below: Some of the Expo stalls





Left: Bishop Columba with facilitator, Qwayne Guevara at the Synod prayer focus

Right: Holy Hour



What Comes Next?

The Synod is over, but the journey continues... Here are some of the next steps that will follow over the coming months and years:

- Everyone is called to reflect on where the Spirit is guiding our Diocese from this synodal discernment
- Bishop Columba will give theological, canonical and practical consideration to the Recommendations and examine the fuller table group responses to the Suggested Implementation Actions
- Following the above, Bishop Columba will promulgate his Response to the Synod with aspirations and actions, and legal Decrees or Declarations as necessary, to carry the Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes forward into the future
- The Diocesan Pastoral Council will further develop the outcomes into Diocesan Action Plans
- The Diocesan Pastoral Council will provide structured ways of reflecting back progress on these outcomes at parish and diocesan levels
- A report will be prepared for the 2027 evaluation phase of the global Synod on Synodality process
- Along with the worldwide Church, all spheres of the Diocese will continue to grow in synodality, with the particular approach and gifts of Wilcannia-Forbes

Our Lady of Perpetual Help, pray for us

