



My dear sisters and brothers of the Toowoomba Diocese,

### **Preamble**

On the day I was received into the Cathedral of the Diocese of Toowoomba two and a half years ago, I shared that my first task would be to get to know you, to listen deeply to your story, and to grow in love for the people entrusted to my care.

These years have been both rewarding and challenging. The challenge has come from witnessing firsthand the realities of life in our Diocese, and the reward has been experiencing the faith, hope, and love that continue to be the hallmarks of the People of God in this vast region.

My goal since arriving has been to *look, listen, and learn*. Although I have many family connections within the Diocese, my ministry as a priest and bishop has been elsewhere. Since July 2023, my main focus has been to get to know the parishes. This takes time, and there are still places I have yet to visit!

Every parish is unique. They are sustained by wonderful people who readily share stories of the priests and religious who have served there and of those who have shaped their community. Many lament that younger families are not participating as they once did. Where there were once regular Masses, some parishes now have only one per week, and country churches may see a priest just once a month – or even less.

Despite these challenges, parishes are doing their best, with Pastoral and Finance Councils offering wisdom and support. Financial pressures are widespread, especially in rural communities where demographic changes are significant. Thankfully, despite these difficulties, the spirit of our parishes remains strong.

We are blessed with wonderful Catholic school communities, where parents, carers, teachers, and students come together to form strong and supportive environments for learning and growth.

Our young people face many challenges, yet there are countless individuals committed to walking alongside them—especially in helping them discover the possibilities that faith offers.

It is impossible to capture everything I have seen, heard, and learnt. Yet, I am constantly surrounded by immeasurable goodness and deep dedication at all levels of Church life. This gives me great hope. There is abundant potential for growth and renewal, especially as we seek to move beyond the barriers that sometimes stand in our way.

I have grown to appreciate what the Church is about in the Diocese of Toowoomba. It's about the people and the things that touch their lives. This understanding also shapes our mission as we look to the future.

---

**Most Reverend Kenneth M Howell**

**Bishop of Toowoomba**

PO Box 756, Toowoomba Qld 4350

Tel: (+61 7) 4632 4277 • Email: [bishop@twb.catholic.org.au](mailto:bishop@twb.catholic.org.au) • [www.twb.catholic.org.au](http://www.twb.catholic.org.au)

As I shared in my pastoral letter at the beginning of September, I believe the time is now right for us to hold a Diocesan Synod. This vision is not new. Our Diocese has embraced synods in the past, notably under Bishop Bill Morris. More recently, Popes have encouraged Synods as a vital way of listening and discerning the path forward for the Church.

## **I. Introduction**

Therefore, in the spirit of communion and collaboration, I hereby convoke a Synod for the Diocese of Toowoomba. This Synod will serve as a vital opportunity for the faithful to engage in meaningful dialogue and discernment in this time and place.

It is an open invitation to all members of our Diocese—clergy, religious, and laity—to come together in prayer and reflection, fostering a deeper understanding of our mission as the People of God. I entrust this process to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who inspires us to work together in response to Christ's call to live our faith in the twenty-first century.

## **II. Objectives of the Synod**

The primary objective of this venture will be to

1. reflect on where we have come from and what we face in our communities today;
2. hear the voices of the people of the Diocese, and through attentive listening to the Gospel, discern a shared purpose and mission;
3. respond to the outcomes of the recent Australian Plenary Council by studying its decrees and aligning with the insights of recent Synods held for the universal Church in Rome;
4. develop realistic pastoral plans for our future mission of the Diocese;
5. foster a deeper passion for Christ's mission among all people, so that we may carry and offer our faith with pride and joy.

## **III. Timeline**

My hope is that we will hold the Synod gathering in October 2026. This will mark the beginning of a journey, one that will carry us not only to this moment, but far beyond it.

In the New Year, everyone will be invited to participate in synodal listening sessions, which will be held in various locations across the Diocese. These gatherings will require thoughtful planning, but they will be essential moments of grace—opportunities to listen to the Holy Spirit speaking through our hopes, concerns, and aspirations.

The insights gathered from these sessions will form the working documents for the Synod event in October. We will share more information about these events in due course.

Please know that you have something unique to offer. In a synodal Church, every voice is heard, every heart is valued, and every step forward is taken together.

## **IV. Participation and Consultation**

I warmly encourage the active participation of all laity, religious, and clergy in this Synod. Each member of our Diocese brings a unique perspective and a valuable contribution, and it is essential that we create an inclusive environment where everyone feels empowered to share their insights.

The fruitfulness of this Synod experience will depend on our collective commitment to listening, learning, and working together for the common good of our Church.

---

**Most Reverend Kenneth M Howell**

**Bishop of Toowoomba**

PO Box 756, Toowoomba Qld 4350

Tel: (+61 7) 4632 4277 • Email: [bishop@twb.catholic.org.au](mailto:bishop@twb.catholic.org.au) • [www.twb.catholic.org.au](http://www.twb.catholic.org.au)

## **V. Call to Prayer**

I invite you all to join in prayer for the success of the Synod, for without prayer, the whole event will fail. We fervently ask the Holy Spirit to guide our discussions, inspire our hearts, and strengthen our resolve to fulfill our mission as disciples of Christ.

## **VI. Conclusion**

In conclusion, I use words I spoke at my Installation in 2023: *"may there be no limit to our faith, our hope or our endurance to bring Christ to the waiting world by preparing his ways in careful, faith-filled and considered ways"*.

Given this day, 23 November, in the year of our Lord 2025, on the Solemnity of Christ the King.

**Kenneth Howell**  
Bishop of Toowoomba

---

**Most Reverend Kenneth M Howell**

**Bishop of Toowoomba**

**PO Box 756, Toowoomba Qld 4350**

**Tel: (+61 7) 4632 4277 • Email: [bishop@twb.catholic.org.au](mailto:bishop@twb.catholic.org.au) • [www.twb.catholic.org.au](http://www.twb.catholic.org.au)**