



Diocese of Sale

MEDIA RELEASE

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Hearts filled with joy, confidence and immense gratitude – The Diocese of Sale 2025 Assembly.

Two hundred and twenty delegates from Catholic parishes, schools, and organizations across the Diocese of Sale gathered at Federation University in Churchill on February 14, and 15 for a Diocesan Assembly focused on defining the pastoral priorities and actions for the next five years. The Diocese of Sale covers a vast and diverse geographic area, extending from Narre Warren in Melbourne's outer southeast through Cranbourne and Phillip Island and across Gippsland to Orbost and Mallacoota in eastern Victoria.

In addition to the delegates, the assembly gathering was blessed with the presence of four special observer who participated in the Assembly process, and contributed their personal, theological and ecumenical insights. These were the Right Reverend Dr. Richard Treloar, Anglican Bishop of Gippsland; Rev. Fiona Morrison, Uniting Church, Presbytery Chairperson for Gippsland; Dr Trudy Dantis, Director of the National Centre for Pastoral Research; and Rev. Dr. Max Vodola, Parish Priest of All Saints Fitzroy & Research Coordinator and Lecturer at Catholic Theological College.

The 2025 Diocesan Assembly marked the culmination of a seven-month consultation process initiated at Pentecost in May 2024 by Bishop Greg Bennet, the Bishop of Sale. The consultation process was conducted in two phases. The first phase asked everyone in the Diocese to reflect on where God's Spirit has been active among them over the past five years. The second phase asked people to identify which pastoral priorities and actions the Holy Spirit is calling the Diocese to put into action during the next five years for the Diocese to grow as a Christ-centred, synodal and missionary church. Feedback

was received from 65 parish groups, 25 individual submissions, and approximately 1,200 student responses. The feedback was then synthesised into an Assembly Working Document and shared with the assembly delegates prior to the assembly to aid their reflection, discernment & preparation.

In his opening address, Bishop Greg Bennet stated, "*We gather from the four winds of the Diocese. We come before the God of wind and fire. We come before the burning bush to encounter the Holy One whose promise is fulfilled in Jesus Christ in whom we find our stories, our church, our mission.*" He also reflected on significant developments since the last Diocesan Assembly in 2019, including leadership transitions and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on parish and community life. He highlighted that this Assembly was a response to the recommendations of the Australian Plenary Council and Pope Francis' call for a synodal church.

Over the two-day Assembly, delegates engaged in prayerful listening and spiritual conversations in 27 table groups to acknowledge and affirm the strengths and best practices of the Diocese, identify the significant challenges being faced, and discern which pastoral priorities needed to be given priority to leverage the movement toward becoming a more Christ-centred, synodal and missionary Church.

The fruits of the two days were evident in the strong sense of communion, grace, positivity and renewed hope expressed by the delegates. "*My heart is filled with joy, confidence and immense gratitude*". "*A wonderful two days filled with richness, faith and friendship beyond my expectations*". "*The experience has given me hope that we will be moving in a direction to secure the future of the Church.*" "*Let's walk in unity as a Diocese and bring these priorities to life through considered action.*"

At the closing Mass, Bishop Greg urged delegates to carry forward the spirit of the Assembly, stating, "*We have stood on holy ground; now it is time to put our shoes back on and go forth as pilgrims of hope to others.*"

The recommendations from the Assembly will be presented to Bishop Greg and the Diocesan Mission Council to help form a Diocesan Pastoral Plan to guide the Diocese over the next five years. One table group in its final message to the Bishop and Council said, *"Be bold in how you throw open the doors of the Church and step outside. Have courage, engage, listen. When you set sail, know that the holy spirit will provide the wind. Keep communication regular to keep the Spirit of the Assembly alive"*.

Media Enquires
Cathy Dugan
Media Liaison Officer
Po Box 1410, Warragul
Victoria – 3820
Phone # 61 3 5622 6600
Email: pa@sale.catholic.org.au