

Catholic Diocese of Bunbury Holds General Assembly

More than 200 delegates gathered from July 30 – August 1 for the historic 3-day Diocesan General Assembly held in the Diocese of Bunbury. The assembly brought together clergy, principals and Catholic school leaders, parish representatives, the youth and people of different faiths from across the diocese. Bishop George Kolodziej, Bishop of Bunbury, initially called for a synodal assembly on the 5th of October 2025 to plan for the future of the diocese.

The Assembly marked the culmination of months of prayer, listening and discernment following the 55 Conversations in the Spirit participated by 622 parishioners conducted throughout the Diocese during the month of June. From those conversations, the Diocesan Synodal Team led by the Kerrie Merritt, Chancellor, identified six pastoral pathways - Evangelisation, Discipleship, Youth, Families, Communion, Mission, and Stewardship – representing the Voices in the Diocese.

Clergy Gathers for Day One

The Assembly opened with a day dedicated to the clergy of the Diocese. With Bishop George attending the installation of the new Bishop of Sandhurst, the Very Rev. Fr. Pierangelo Repuyan, PhD, Vicar General, celebrated the Opening Mass before priests entered Conversations in the Spirit. Although absent, Bishop George addressed the clergy through a recorded video message that set the spiritual tone for the Assembly.

"My brothers, I encourage you to speak openly. I encourage you to speak from your own experience. I encourage you to speak about the blessings you see in your parish. I encourage you to speak honestly about the challenges you carry. I encourage you to speak about the hopes you have for the future of our Diocese."

Bishop George's invitation reflected the essence of the Synodal process—listening with humility, speaking honestly, and trusting that the Holy Spirit guides the Church through every member of the People of God.

Schools and Parishes Share One Mission for Day Two

The conversation was expanded during the second day as 85 Catholic school leaders and clergy gathered at Bunbury Catholic College to continue the discernment process. Working together in small groups, participants reflected on the same six pastoral pathways, sharing experiences from parish and school communities.

Among those participating was Carlo Pardini, Bunbury Regional Officer for Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA), who praised the distinctive approach of Conversations in the Spirit.

"What we've really appreciated is the time to actually stop and have some silence and process what's being said. It helped clarify your own thoughts and give some direction to what you are about to say."

In his opening remarks, Bishop George reminded participants that Catholic schools and parishes share one common mission.

"Our task as priests and educational leaders is not merely to manage institutions. Our vocation is to help people encounter Christ, whose words are spirit and life. Although our ministries differ, our mission is one. We are all entrusted with forming hearts."

His words reinforced the Diocese's desire for closer collaboration between schools and parishes in forming missionary disciples for the future.

The afternoon concluded with the blessing of the new Pastoral Life and Mission Centre, a significant milestone in the Diocese's ongoing pastoral renewal and a visible expression of its commitment to formation, accompaniment and mission.

A Diocese Walking Together for Day Three

The final day marked the Assembly's largest gathering, bringing together more than 155 delegates from every corner of the Diocese.

Participants included parish leaders, clergy, principals, teachers, diocesan staff, ministry representatives and young people, all contributing their voices to the conversations shaping the future of the Diocese. The Assembly was also enriched by four invited observers: Rt. Rev. Dr. Bishop Ian Coutts, Anglican Bishop of Bunbury; Annette Morey, Executive Director of Catholic Education Western Australia; Debra Sayce, Chief of Mission Enhancement and Outreach, Archdiocese of Perth; and Michelle Scott, Safeguarding Coordinator for the Diocese of Bunbury.

Welcoming the openness of the Synodal process, Bishop Ian Coutts observed, "It was very brave of you to invite us on your Synodal Journey."

Representatives from the Catholic Development Fund, Saint John of God Health Care, Caritas Australia, Catholic Mission and Social Justice ministries also joined the Assembly, highlighting the broad partnership that supports the Church's mission throughout the Diocese.

Young people were intentionally included among the delegates, ensuring that the voices of the next generation helped shape the Diocese's future. Nathan, a youth leader from Esperance, expressed his hope that the Assembly would bear lasting fruit.

"It's nice to see so many people around the Diocese that come together to share their challenges and insights about how we can move forward from here. It's nice to see a lot of clergy giving perspectives on things. Hopefully something good comes out of this, bringing positive change and helping reawaken the faith in our Diocese."

A Prophetic Challenge

Among the many insights that emerged during the Assembly, one observation resonated deeply across all three days. One parishioner bravely stands to speak of his realisation that everyone gathered in the Assembly represented only about one percent (1%) of the Diocese. (622 voices participated in the parish conversations out of 63,112 Catholics) Far from being discouraged, the insight became a prophetic challenge. If those present represented just one percent of the Catholic community, then the Church's mission is directed toward the remaining ninety-nine percent (99%), those who have drifted away, those who feel disconnected, and those still waiting to encounter the love of Christ.

Another recurring theme throughout the Assembly was the call for a genuine formation of the heart. Again and again, participants recognised that authentic renewal begins not with programmes or pastoral plans, but with disciples whose hearts have been transformed by Christ.

The Diocesan General Assembly concluded with the celebration of the Eucharist at St Patrick's Cathedral, where Bishop George reflected on what he hopes will be the lasting legacy of these grace-filled days.

"My prayer is that when people look at our Diocese after these days, they will not first notice new structures or new plans. They will notice something much deeper. They will notice people who listen more carefully. People who pray more deeply. People who walk together faithfully. People whose hearts have been warmed by the presence of Christ."

Towards Diocesan Five-Year Pastoral Plan

The fruits of the conversations and discernment from the three-day Assembly will now be taken back to parishes, schools, and ministries across the Diocese for prayer, reflection, and further consultation.

The Diocese will gather once again in May 2027 for the Second Diocesan General Assembly. It is anticipated that, drawing from the voices of the faithful across the Diocese, Bishop George Kolodziej, SDS, DD, will present the Diocese's Five-Year Pastoral Plan—a pastoral roadmap that will guide the Catholic Diocese of Bunbury in its mission of evangelisation, discipleship, and synodal renewal for the years ahead.