



Formation and Participation

INTRODUCTION

The Melbourne Synod is an invitation to our local Church to listen attentively to the Holy Spirit and to discern how we are called to proclaim the Gospel more faithfully in our time and place. The purpose of this synod is to help shape our evangelical and missionary priorities for the years ahead. This synodal journey will focus on three themes: Young Discipleship, Missionary Leadership, and Formation and Participation.

This paper has been prepared to assist with reflection on the theme of *Formation and Participation*. As we reflect on this theme, we are encouraged to ponder: Where is the Holy Spirit leading our Archdiocese at this time? Whom are we being called to accompany in faith more intentionally? How might we reflect the face of Christ more clearly in our local Church?

This paper aims to foster a spirit of hope and imagination—trusting that, as we walk together, God is calling us into a future marked by faithfulness, renewal and deeper communion.

Reflect:

Do you have a story about your experience of formation and participation?

Share your experience via email:
synod@cam.org.au

UNDERSTANDING FORMATION

In the Catholic tradition, *formation* is the ongoing, transformative process of shaping a person to live as a disciple of Christ. Grounded in faith and guided by the Holy Spirit, it involves theological reflection, dialogue and discernment.

Formation is lifelong. It integrates belief, practice and attitude, helping individuals grow in their relationship with God and live out their faith at every stage of life. As such, formation is never complete; God continually shapes each person throughout their life.

At its heart, formation enables all people to participate more fully in the life and mission of the Church. Formation in faith shapes the heart and mind for the work of evangelisation, the sharing of the Good News about Jesus Christ and inviting others to respond to this message in faith.

FORMATION FLOWS FROM BAPTISM

Formation is grounded in baptism and in the dignity and vocation of all the People of God. Through baptism, all—lay, ordained, religious—are called to:

- *discipleship*: a lifelong journey of following Christ, deepening knowledge of him and leading others to him
- *co-responsibility*: shared responsibility for the Church's life, mission and witness
- *missionary engagement*: active participation in God's mission in the world.

Formation nurtures this calling by fostering conversion of heart, maturity of faith and the capacity to interpret the signs of the times in light of the Gospel. As faith deepens, participation in the life of the Church naturally grows.

FORMATION IS PARTICIPATORY, RELATIONAL AND MISSIONARY

Formation in a synodal Church is:

- *participatory*—engaging all the baptised as active contributors
- *relational*—formed through community, accompaniment and shared experience
- *missionary*—directed outward in service, witness and evangelisation.

Throughout the Archdiocese of Melbourne, formation finds its expression in a variety of ways, including:

- RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults)
- theological and pastoral study opportunities
- youth and young adult ministry
- accreditation for Catholic educators
- programs such as *The Bethany Way*
- ecclesial movements and communities
- involvement in events such as the Australian Catholic Youth Festival and World Youth Day
- children's sacramental programs
- family ministry
- ongoing priestly formation aligned with *Pastores dabo vobis*.

CHALLENGES TO FORMATION AND PARTICIPATION

Despite its importance, access to formation is uneven. People experience limited opportunities, or they encounter approaches that focus primarily on information rather than transformation. There are other pressures, such as a lack of engagement in the life of the Church, and a growing gap between the lived reality of our people and their connection with their local parishes and with parish life.

There is a growing need for formation that is:

- accessible and inclusive
- integrated across life stages
- responsive to contemporary cultural and pastoral realities.

FORMATION IN A SYNODAL CHURCH

The synodal process has highlighted formation as a central priority. There is a clear desire for formation that deepens faith, builds capability and fosters authentic Christian witness.

Formation is essential to the Church's communion, participation and mission. It enables all the baptised to grow in relationship with Christ and to engage actively in the life of the Church.

It also cultivates a culture of synodality by forming people in:

- listening and dialogue
- communal discernment
- respectful engagement with diversity
- shared responsibility in decision-making.

These capacities require intentional development through formation.

The formation of missionary disciples begins with Christian initiation and is sustained through relationships within families, communities and the wider Church (compare Synod of Bishops Final Document, §142).

LIFELONG FORMATION

Ideally, faith formation accompanies people throughout their lives and across all vocations. While catechesis provides essential foundations, ongoing adult formation is particularly vital so that faith can mature and respond to complex personal, social and cultural realities. Formation in witness, mission holiness and service is for all the People of God—clergy, religious and lay people.

Not everyone has this experience, however. For some, access to formation is limited.



FORMATION IS WHOLISTIC AND INCLUSIVE

Formation engages the whole person and includes:

- *human formation*, through which identity, character, values and capacities—emotional, intellectual, social, moral, spiritual—are developed
- *intellectual formation*, grounded in Scripture, Tradition, and Catholic Social Teaching
- *spiritual formation*, grounded in prayer, the sacraments and discernment
- *pastoral and missionary formation*, expressed through service, accompaniment, and commitment to justice and care for the marginalised.

FORMATION SERVES MISSION

Ultimately, formation serves mission. A Church that invests in formation is better able to proclaim the Gospel with credibility, accompany those who are wounded or searching, and engage the world with hope. Formation enables the People of God to be missionary disciples, witnessing together to Christ in word and action.

In light of this, formation becomes as a shared priority requiring commitment at all levels of the Church. By renewing our approach to formation, we strengthen our capacity to walk together, to discern faithfully and to respond courageously to the call of the Spirit today.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Where do people in my community experience growth in faith and discipleship?
- What prevents people from participating more fully in the life and mission of the Church?
- Which groups might be needing further formation?
- What forms of formation are most needed today?
- What three priorities could the Archdiocese seek to implement to strengthen formation and participation over the next five years?



FURTHER READING

Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, [Balancing Holiness and Mission](#).

Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, [Called by Christ](#).

Pope Francis, [For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission](#), Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Part V: “So I send you”: Forming People for Missionary Discipleship’.

NEXT STEP

Please provide your feedback by scanning the QR code below or visiting:

<https://melbcath.org/synod-formation>

