



**Plenary Council 2020**  
Listen to what the Spirit is saying...

# *Listen to what the Spirit is saying*

FINAL REPORT FOR THE PLENARY COUNCIL  
PHASE I: LISTENING AND DIALOGUE

Trudy Dantis  
Paul Howell  
Stephen Reid  
Leith Dudfield



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**NCPR**  
National Centre for Pastoral Research



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. We honour and acknowledge the continuing deep spiritual relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to this country, and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are respectfully advised that this publication may contain images, names and/or references to those that have passed.



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The Archdiocese of Perth  
The ACBC Youth Ministry  
NATSICC

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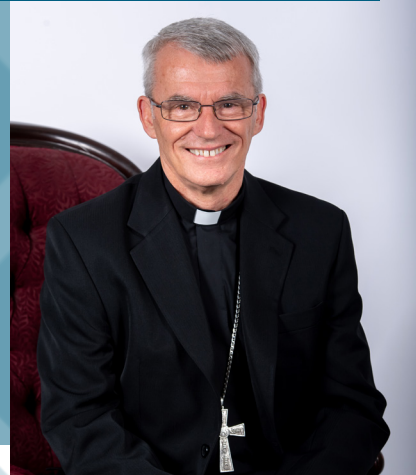
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## Foreword



provided by the Second Vatican Council, we read this:

*... the Church is in Christ, like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race (LG 1).*

This is a powerful statement which takes us to the heart of the Church's self-understanding. All of us who belong to the Church are called to be, together, a clear and unmistakable sign, and an effective and powerful instrument, of the communion with God in Christ for which God created us in the first place. We are also called to be in communion with each other and all God's people, for which God has also created us. The two go together.

When we ask ourselves, therefore, as we have been doing throughout the Plenary Council journey so far, what we believe God is asking of us at this time, we might rephrase it this way: What is God inviting us to do to enable our transformation—with the grace of the Holy Spirit—into a community of disciples who are journeying together into a deeper intimacy with God, and a deeper realisation that because we have the one Father in heaven we are all, without exception, brothers and sisters?

The fact that over 222,000 of us were moved to respond to the question of the Listening and Dialogue phase of our Plenary Council journey, should be a source of great encouragement and hope for the whole Church in Australia. There is a deep desire for us, the people God has called into the communion of the Catholic Church in Australia, to become more fully and more genuinely what God is calling us, and needs us, to be. As you read through the final report of the submissions, which were collected during the Listening and Dialogue phase, I hope you will be encouraged by the passion and commitment which the invitation to enter the journey has generated in such an extraordinary way.

Those of you who did respond, will, I hope, recognise the presence of your own contribution in this report, even if not expressed in your own words. You will find that many others share your perspective. At the same time you may be challenged, and even disturbed, by the responses of others who have proposed very different, and at times contradictory, positions to your own. The ongoing journey of the Plenary Council provides us all with an opportunity to deepen our own reflection in the light of what other members of the Church have expressed, as together we now enter into the next phase of the journey: the Listening and Discernment phase.

Foundational to the process we are following, is the conviction that we, the priestly people of God, listen to God by listening to each other. In the first phase of our journey, this listening has produced an extraordinary treasure of ideas and proposals which represents the heartfelt response of many people. The great challenge ahead of us now is to “catch” the voice of the Holy Spirit within the passionate, hopeful, but sometimes contradictory voices of God's people.

This is the challenge of discernment—that deep listening to all the ways in which God speaks to us:

- through Jesus, the Word made flesh, especially as we encounter him in the Gospels;
- through the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church over the last 2,000 years, and through her teachings and Tradition;
- through the “signs of the times”, the realities of the world in which we live;
- through our own stories of life and faith; and
- Through the communion we share with our brothers and sisters in the Church.

Discernment requires patience, deep faith, genuine openness and, perhaps above all else, a profound humility which unites us to the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Father, not my will but your will be done” (Lk 22:42). Who knows how much we

might be called to let go of in order to allow God's plan for the Church in Australia to prevail?

When Jesus asked his disciples who they believed Him to be (cf. Matt 16:13-23), Peter proclaimed Him to be the “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt 16:16). Peter was absolutely right, of course. Jesus congratulated him but reminded him that his insight was a gift from God. But when Jesus went on to explain what it meant to be the Christ—that he would have to suffer and die—Peter refused to accept this because it did not correspond with Peter's very firm view of what the Christ should be—not a suffering servant, but a triumphant hero. Jesus then told Peter to stand aside because he was an obstacle in Jesus's path. It seems, strangely, that you can be right and wrong about Jesus all at the same time.

As we now enter into the crucial phase of Listening and Discernment, and as we begin to engage with the National Themes for Discernment which have emerged from the material found in this report, may we be open to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit who will lead us into the fullness of the Truth (cf. Jn16:13) and eager for that gift of humility which will equip us for the opportunities, the challenges and the joys, which now lay ahead of us.

My sincere thanks go to Dr Trudy Dantis and her team at the National Centre for Pastoral Research. They have done an extraordinary job in analysing, collating and summarising all the submissions which were collected during the Listening and Dialogue process. The Church in Australia owes them all an enormous debt of gratitude.

*+Timothy Costelloe SDB*

**+Archbishop Tim Costelloe SDB**

President

Plenary Council 2020



ABOUT THE NATIONAL CENTRE  
FOR PASTORAL RESEARCH



The National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) is an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference whose mission is to assist the Catholic Church in Australia at all levels in understanding the cultural, social and personal dimensions of religion in the changing contemporary context. The work of the NCPR is overseen by the Australian Catholic Council for Pastoral Research which, in turn, reports to the Permanent Committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The NCPR was established in 1996 and was located on the Melbourne campus of Australian Catholic University between 2004 and 2017. Since the beginning of 2018, the office has been located in Canberra. Previous research studies conducted by the National Centre for Pastoral Research include *Understanding Religious Vocation in Australia Today* (2018), *Our Work Matters: Catholic Church Employers and Employees in Australia* (2017), *Called to Fullness of Life and Love: National Report on the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Youth Survey* (2017), *Building Stronger Parishes* (2015) and *Catholics who have Stopped Attending Mass* (2007).



About the Authors

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# Executive Summary

This report was the result of an invitation from the Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council to the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) to carry out the analysis of submissions that were received during Phase 1 of the Plenary Council 2020 process: Listening and Dialogue.

The main purpose of the Plenary Council is to discern what God is asking of us in Australia at this present time. In preparation for the Council, the Plenary Council Executive Committee outlined a three-year process that would lead to the development of the agenda for the first session of the Plenary Council.

The main purpose of the 'Listening and Dialogue' phase was to listen to the voice of God speaking through the voices of the people, in order to gain a "sense of the faith" (*sensus fidei*, EG119). For this reason, the diverse perspectives of many people were sought to contribute to the conversation during this phase.

The Listening and Dialogue phase offered an opportunity for both groups and individuals to reflect on and contribute to the three focus questions:

1. What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?
2. What questions do you have about the future of the Church in Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?
3. You are invited to share a story about your experience of faith or an experience of the Church in Australia that has shaped you.

The analysis of the responses that were received during this phase sought to understand the following:

1. What are some common themes that are emerging from the submissions made by individuals and groups across Australia?
2. What questions would participants like the Plenary Council to consider?
3. What are some experiences of faith, life or church shared by participants? Are there common themes arising in these experiences?

Responses were sought mainly from Catholics in Australia, through a wide-spread promotion in parishes, dioceses, schools, Catholic agencies and community groups. Submissions were primarily received through the online survey portal, which was accessible through the Plenary Council website. However, there were also a significant number of submissions sent through emails and in hard copy through the 2018 Christmas card campaign, as well as through letters, reports, books, artwork, audio and video files.

Participants were encouraged to engage in a Listening and Dialogue session prior to submitting their response, although this was not mandatory. The Listening and Dialogue phase began at Pentecost on 20 May 2018 and ran until Ash Wednesday on 6 March 2019. Due to the high response rate during the final two months, the deadline was extended to 13 March 2019.

There was a total of 17,457 submissions received. Individuals made 12,758 submissions, while a further 4,699 submissions were from groups or organisations. There were more than 209,170 people represented through these 4,699 groups, bringing the total number of participants to over 222,000. At least 35 individual submissions were received from every one of the 28 geographical dioceses in Australia.

The highest number of individual submissions (1,890) were received from the Archdiocese of Brisbane, while the highest number of group submissions (791) were received from the Archdiocese of Melbourne. About 44 per cent of individual submissions (5,663) were received from those aged 50 and over. The greatest number of submissions within this age range were received from the 70-74 years age group (1,081 responses). At the close of submissions there was a total of 1,607 submissions received from those aged under 25. This represented almost 14 per cent of the total number of individual participants.

Around half the number of all individual participants were female (6,219), while a further 30 per cent were male (3,701). The remaining did not state their sex. At the close of submissions there were 143 individuals

who identified themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, representing just over one per cent of all individual participants. As expected, a large number of participants (65%) were born in Australia. Just under 16 per cent came from other countries, while around 19 per cent did not state their birthplace. The top five countries of participants born overseas were the United Kingdom (including Northern Ireland), the Philippines, India, New Zealand and Ireland.

Around 72 per cent of individual participants were Catholic, with a further three per cent identifying as other Christian, one per cent from a non-Christian religion and two per cent who identified as No Religion. Twenty-two per cent did not provide a response. For those who indicated they were Catholic, a further question asked them to describe their participation in church activities. Around 76 per cent of those participants indicated that they regularly attended Mass and other church activities. Thirteen per cent said they went to Mass and church activities sometimes, while the remaining 12 per cent indicated less involvement or did not provide a response.

The topics people discussed in their submissions were wide-ranging and the submissions demonstrated the diversity of people, their faith and their experiences of the Church in Australia. There was a key focus on sacramental life, naming themes particularly around the sacraments of Mass, Holy Orders, Matrimony and Reconciliation. Respondents discussed different ways to improve the sacraments which would increase church attendance and allow the fullness of a Catholic life to flourish. Strongly discussed topics included the rule of celibacy for priests, the ordination of women and the inclusion of divorced and remarried Catholics.

There was a similarly strong focus on the love of God and of neighbour, with many responding with the words of the Great Commandment:

*'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You*

*shall love your neighbour as yourself.'* (Matt 22:37-39)

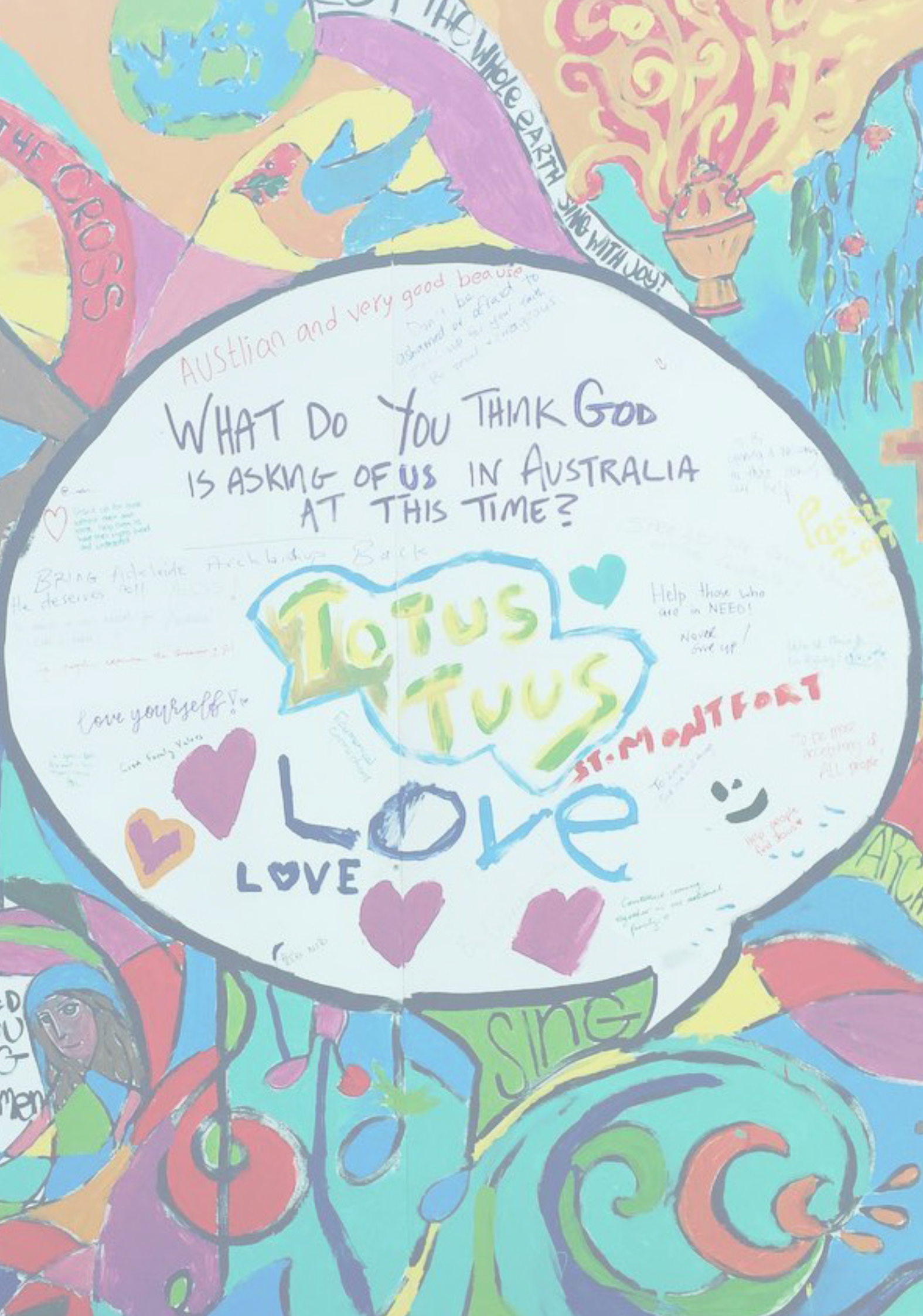
Numerous respondents expressed a desire for a greater trust and love in Jesus Christ, as well as yearning for a greater demonstration of caring for one's neighbours in everyday life. Many expressed a desire to remain faithful to Catholic teaching, and there was a particularly strong need for greater faith formation.

The structure of Church life drew a great deal of attention with respondents discussing issues around leadership and governance, the need for greater listening—both to one another and by the hierarchy to the laity—and the need to modernise Church teachings to bring them in line with Australian society in the 21st century. There was also a focus on various Church organisations, such as parishes and Catholic schools. Amidst it all, there was a passionate desire expressed for a greater involvement of the laity at all levels.

Many respondents discussed the need for greater outreach and evangelisation, particularly to young people. There was also a significant desire for the Church to humble itself in the light of the clergy sexual abuse crisis and for more to be done to offer healing and restoration to those affected. The appeal for the Church to be inclusive was fervently expressed and extended, especially to women, LGBTI people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, as well as many other vulnerable groups.

This comprehensive report provides an overview of the content of the submissions and presents the emerging themes. Further reports are expected to be produced which will unpack the extent of the responses more fully. The second phase of 'Listening and Discernment', which begins in August 2019, will continue the reflection on, and discernment of, the deeper hopes and questions, and the diverse yearnings, that were revealed during this initial phase. The scope and range of the responses, together with the engagement and honesty of the thousands of people who participated in this process, will continue to shape the Church in Australia for years to come.





# INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church in Australia is in a period of significant change, affected not only by the changing context of Australian society, but specifically in the light of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Australian Census figures revealed that the number of people identifying as Catholics between 2011 and 2016 decreased by 2.7 per cent, for the first time in Australia's 105 year Census history. Australian Catholics were slightly older, with a median age of 40 years as compared to 38 in 2011. An increasing proportion of Catholics aged 15 and over (20.6%) had a university degree and a higher proportion of Catholics (19.1%) were born in non-English speaking countries. The 2016 National Count of Attendance revealed that the number of people at Mass on a typical weekend was about 623,000, or 11.8 per cent of the Catholic population. This was a decline of 5.9 per cent, or around 39,000 people, from the 2011 Count. Against this backdrop, in 2017, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference sought

permission to hold a plenary council, its first in more than 80 years.

A plenary council is the most significant gathering that can be held for the Catholic Church with the highest level of authority. The resolutions made at the Council have both legislative and governance authority, which means that final decisions become binding for the Catholic Church in Australia.

Previous plenary councils were held in Australia in 1885, 1895, 1905 and 1937. The bishops of New Zealand were full participants in both the first (1885) and fourth (1937) plenary councils. The councils of 1885, 1895 and 1905, under the guidance of Cardinal Patrick Francis Moran (1830-1911), established dioceses and decrees that supported the pastoral actions of the expanding Catholic Church in Australia. The agendas were determined locally by the bishops and the acts and decrees resulting from them were sent to the Holy See for *recognitio*.



The fourth Council in 1937 was conceived in a different manner and was driven by a focus on implementing the 1917 *Code of Canon Law*, which had been promulgated since the last plenary council. The agenda and schema for the 1937 Council were determined solely by the Apostolic Delegate. At the Council, the decrees were read out and unanimously approved by the council members with amendments to only three of the 685 decrees. Most of the decrees of the previous three councils were repealed.

In the years following the fourth Council, the bishops of Australia sought a new model of working together, which led to the establishment of the Bishops Conference and related committees and commissions. At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the need for episcopal conferences was mandated for the entire Church, which cemented the Australian model. Vatican II expressed a desire for synods and councils to “flourish with fresh vigor” (CD36). However, with the exception of the episcopal conferences, there was little engagement for some time.

At his address at the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis encouraged the development of a synodal Church which “journeys together” (17 October 2015 Address). He explained his vision of a synodal Church as one which:

*... listens, which realizes that listening is ‘more than simply hearing’. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn.*

Inspired by this encouragement, at the bishops’ plenary meeting in November 2015, it was agreed that a national ecclesial event would be held. In announcing this decision, Archbishop Coleridge remarked:

*The decision was recognition that we can no longer put up a sign saying, ‘Business as usual’. The Royal Commission has made that abundantly clear.*

Following the 2015 plenary meeting, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) voted to seek approval to hold a plenary council in 2020. In preparation for the council, a Plenary Council Executive Committee and a Facilitation Team were established by the ACBC. Together they outlined a three-year project—“Journey to Plenary Council 2018-2020”—to develop the focus and agenda of the Council. Consent to hold a plenary council was granted by Pope Francis in March 2018, and preparations for Plenary Council 2020 began in earnest.

Plenary Council 2020 will be the fifth plenary council in Australia’s history. It will be only the third plenary council to be held globally since Vatican II, with previous ones being in the Philippines (1991) and Poland (1993).

## The Plenary Council 2020 Process

Plenary Council 2020 is being held in three stages: preparation, celebration and implementation. Preparation, the first stage, which begins with the decision to hold a council, continuing until the first session of the council. Celebration of the council will be held over two sessions in October 2020 in Adelaide and in May 2021 in Sydney. Implementation will be the ongoing process of applying the decrees and decisions made at the council to the life of the Church in Australia.

The intention of the preparation process for the Plenary Council 2020 is that the agenda for the

Council will be developed from the “sense of faith” (*sensus fidei*, EG119) among the people of God in Australia. To facilitate this, people connected with the Catholic Church were invited to reflect on the question: “What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?”

Phase 1 of “Journey to Plenary Council 2018-2020” was titled ‘Listening and Dialogue’. The Listening and Dialogue phase offered an opportunity for both groups and individuals to reflect on and contribute to responding to the question. Listening and Dialogue sessions were hosted for groups around Australia, some facilitated by the Plenary Council Facilitation Team, others by parish or interest groups.

The Bishops Conference for the Plenary Council commissioned the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) to oversee the data collection and analysis of the Listening and Dialogue stage. The NCPR formed a research task group to guide the research process. This group included members from the Plenary Council Executive Committee, the Australian Catholic Council for Pastoral Research and experienced researchers recognised for their expertise, along with key NCPR staff.

The initial launch of the project was accompanied by the *Plenary Council Launch Guide* (Appendix 1), followed by the *Plenary Council Parish Guide* (Appendix 2) which set out ways in which a parish might encourage its congregation to participate in the process. A *Prayer Card* (Appendix 3) was also provided to help people supplement their dialogue with prayer throughout the process.

Guides for Listening and Dialogue sessions were available on the Plenary Council website. These guides were focused on the needs of specific groups, such as the *Listening and Dialogue Guide for Adults* in Appendix 4, which was also provided in ten different languages, and the *Yarning Circle Reflection* in Appendix 5, which was written by

the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Individual dioceses also created their own customised Listening and Dialogue guides that met the needs of their people. Their approaches were quite varied. One example of this is the *Broken Bay Diocese Listening and Dialogue Guide* in Appendix 6. Some dioceses also created facilitation guides to assist local coordinators in hosting a Listening and Dialogue session, such as the *Broken Bay Diocese Facilitators Guide* found in Appendix 7.

Following the Listening and Dialogue sessions, participants were invited to submit either an individual response or a group response via the online portal on the Plenary Council website. Hard copy and email submissions were also acceptable. Submissions were also accepted from those who did not attend a Listening and Dialogue session. The intention of the Listening and Dialogue sessions was to encourage people to speak boldly and honestly, and to listen humbly to one another, and in doing so, try to listen to God. Participants were encouraged to “listen to what the Spirit is saying” (Rev 2:7).

Following the close of submissions in March 2019, the responses were analysed—using both quantitative and qualitative methods—by the NCPR. The qualitative analysis of the data highlighted many emerging themes. The Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council, the Plenary Council Executive Committee and the Facilitation Team considered and reflected on these themes and used a combination of prayer and discernment to finalise six National Themes for Discernment. These are expressed in the question as follows:



*How is God calling us to be a Christ-Centred Church in Australia that is*

- *Missionary and evangelising*
- *Inclusive, participatory and synodal*
- *Prayerful and Eucharistic*
- *Humble, healing and merciful*
- *A joyful, hope-filled and servant community*
- *Open to conversion, renewal and reform*

A series of *Snapshot Reports* (Appendices 15-20) were prepared that explained each theme and included a sample of the voices and answers that inspired that theme.

Phase 2 of the journey will be to undertake a further discernment process from June 2019 to April 2020, drawing on the six National Themes for Discernment. This discernment process will involve establishing Discernment and Writing Groups for each National Theme for Discernment. Along with this, people in faith communities across Australia will be called to

participate locally in their own communal Listening and Discernment sessions. The fruits of what are discerned during this time will shape the agenda of the first session of Plenary Council in October 2020.

## About this Report

The findings in this report provide an analysis of submissions that were received in Phase 1 of the Plenary Council preparation process. The online process for submissions in Phase 1 opened on 20 May 2018 and was due to run until 6 March 2019. Due to the high response rate in the last two months, this deadline was extended to 13 March 2019.

Included in this report is data from the online submissions, along with those received via email or in hard copy format, such as letters, books and submissions made through the 2018 Christmas card campaign.

Participants in this phase were asked to respond to three main questions:

1. What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?
2. What questions do you have about the future of the Church in Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?
3. You are invited to share a story about your experience of faith or an experience of the Church in Australia that has shaped you.

The analysis provided in this report is mainly qualitative in nature and explores the themes that emerged from the submissions. These themes are grouped together under 14 topics and have arisen from answers provided by participants to the main question, “What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?” The report also includes within each topic a sample of questions from participants for the Plenary Council. Some stories of faith shared by the participants are also spread throughout the report.

The extensive volume and breadth of responses were testament to the engagement of the community and the diversity of the Church in Australia. However, in a report such as this one, it is not possible to include the entirety of what was submitted. Therefore, within each topic the authors have provided an analysis with a good overview of the submissions received, and quotes are used throughout the report indicative of the types of responses received within each theme. At the end of each chapter, a recommended reading list is also provided that highlights previous research studies and other pertinent resources on topics discussed by participants within that chapter. The volume and breadth of the responses also meant that more intensive in-depth analysis was not possible at this stage. The report therefore does not include analysis of the responses by age, sex, locality, country of birth, religion and Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander status. Further research is needed in each of these areas.

We hope you find this report insightful and helpful for the continuing process of discernment for Plenary Council 2020.

## Structure of the report

This introductory chapter is followed by one that describes the research method chosen for the project. It includes information on the research questions, the processes used to recruit participants and the methods used to analyse the data. A number of ethical issues related to participant consent, privacy and confidentiality are discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 3 describes the participants involved in the project and profiles them in terms of their demographic characteristics such as age, gender, diocese, birthplace and religion.

Chapters 4 to 17 provide details on the main findings that emerged from the analysis of the submissions made in the Listening and Dialogue phase.

Chapter 4 addresses the topic of “Love God, Love Neighbour”—a phrase voiced by many participants. This chapter includes themes such as greater trust, faith and hope in God and a greater focus on Christ and the Word of God. Other themes such as care for neighbour, faithfulness to Church teaching, greater support for faith formation and a renewed call to holiness are also discussed here.

Chapter 5 addresses the topic of the Mass and themes associated with it. Within this chapter are found themes such as better attention to all aspects of the liturgy, inclusion of the divorced and remarried, increasing opportunities for Eucharistic Adoration and making the Mass appealing to youth and children, amongst many others.



Chapter 6 looks at the sacraments, in particular, those of Holy Orders and Marriage. Themes such as the ordination of women, a greater focus on deacons, restoring the Third Rite of Reconciliation and providing better preparation and support for engaged and married couples are discussed here.

Chapter 7 addresses the topic of leadership and Church governance. This chapter includes themes such as the need to end clericalism, promote servant leadership and encourage a greater involvement of the laity. Also found here are themes related to the desire for a new leadership and governance model, a greater leadership role for women within the Church and better selection and formation of candidates for the priesthood.

Chapter 8 looks at the responses pertaining to sexual abuse and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. A number of themes emerged such as the need for more transparency, accountability and balanced news reporting, greater concern for victims and survivors, and better implementation of the Royal Commission recommendations.

Chapter 9 addresses issues relating to social justice and the environment. Within this chapter are found themes relating to a greater inclusion of all people and ending discrimination of LGBTI people. The chapter also discusses themes such as reducing inequality in society, having greater care and respect for the environment and addressing the

defence of religious freedom and right-to-life issues in Australia.

Chapter 10 looks at responses pertaining to outreach. This chapter includes themes such as the need for greater connection with, and inclusion of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, encouraging non-Church-going Catholics to return to the practice of their faith, providing outreach to same-sex-attracted persons and also to young people and the wider community.

Chapter 11 addresses the topic of evangelisation. Within this chapter are found themes such as sharing the faith with others and evangelisation in and of the family. Also discussed here are themes related to a greater focus on mission, encouraging

vocations and the need for greater evangelisation in Australian society.

Chapter 12 considers responses discussing the need for more listening. Three themes—listening to one another more, listening to the Holy Spirit and the need for the Church hierarchy to listen to the laity more attentively—are discussed here.

Chapter 13 looks at youth ministry and related themes. It contains themes such as the need for better training and support for youth leaders, better youth ministry resources and programs, better youth faith formation and for provision of more youth facilities.

Chapter 14 addresses the topic of Catholic education in schools. Within this chapter are found



themes such as the need for better teachers in Catholic schools and for more authentic teaching of the Catholic faith. It also addresses better faith formation for teachers, greater faith formation for parents and the need for more chaplains and youth ministers in schools.

Chapter 15 looks at the topic of parishes. A number of themes are addressed here such as the creation of stronger parish communities, the formation of small Christian communities, an emphasis on parish pastoral councils, the need to create more welcoming parishes and special care for rural parishes.

Chapter 16 addresses responses that discuss bringing the Church into the 21st century. Within this chapter are found themes such as the need for a better promotion of the Church through a range of communication channels, a need to modernise Church teachings and the request for a radical overhaul of the organisational structure of the Church.

Chapter 17 looks at responses asking for better Plenary Council processes. Within this chapter are found themes relating to the scepticism that surrounds the process, the concerns about its potential to make a change in the Church and the disappointment of some with regards to the lack of lay people and women given decision-making roles on the Council.

Chapter 18 provides a conclusion to the report and discusses the journey ahead towards Plenary Council 2020.

The final sections of the report contain acknowledgements of the contributions of the many people who supported this project, a bibliography of the works consulted in its preparation, along with a number of appendices with documents developed for the Plenary Council process, guides for facilitators and participants in the Listening and Dialogue sessions, the online survey questionnaire and other documents relating to the research.

## RECOMMENDED READING

The 2016 Social Profile of the Catholic Community in Australia provides a comprehensive snapshot and time change summary of the Australian Catholic population using customised data from the 2016 Australian Census.

*National Centre for Pastoral Research. 2019. "Social Profile of the Catholic Community in Australia: Based on the 2016 Australian Census". ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)*

The National Count of Attendance is conducted every five years. National and diocesan results from the most recent one, held in 2016, were reported in the April 2019 edition of Pastoral Research Online, the bulletin of the NCPR.

*National Centre for Pastoral Research. 2019. "Mass attendance: 2016 National Count of Attendance—National Summary". Pastoral Research Online. no. 44: 2-3. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)*

Once every five years, Mass attenders from hundreds of Catholic parishes take part in the multi-denominational National Church Life Survey by completing a questionnaire on their faith, their involvement in church life and a variety of other topics. The results are reported in a comprehensive denominational profile.

*NCLS Research. 2017. "Church Life Profile for The Catholic Church in Australia: A Report on the Vitality of Local Churches who Took Part in the 2016 National Church Life Survey". NCLS Research. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)*



## 2

## THE RESEARCH METHOD

**The Research Questions**

As described in Chapter 1, the main purpose of Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue sessions was to listen to the voice of God speaking through the voices of the people. For this reason, each person's perspective was important and the intention of this approach was to ensure that as many people as possible had a say in the conversation.

A research strategy was employed to analyse the responses to the questions asked in Phase 1. The focus of this analysis was aimed at addressing the following questions:

1. What are some common themes that are emerging from the submissions made by individuals and groups across Australia?
2. What questions would participants like the Plenary Council to consider?
3. What are some experiences of faith, life or church shared by participants? Are there common themes arising in these experiences?

The analysis informed the processes that were developed for Phase 2 of the Plenary Council preparation process.

**Research Methodology**

The approach chosen for this analysis was an exploratory study using a predominantly qualitative strategy. The strength of this approach was consistent with the overall aims of the project which sought to uncover the richness and depth of the data contained in the submissions. A qualitative approach allowed the researchers to listen to the varied stories and responses of the participants and collect detailed information on their views on certain topics and their reasons for highlighting particular issues. Basic quantitative methods associated with the large-scale sample surveys were used for the demographic analysis of participants in the study.

**Participant Recruitment**

Participants were invited to take part in the study in one of a number of ways. The online submission portal on the Plenary Council website was open to everyone who had access to the internet. While the target audience was primarily aimed at Catholics in Australia, people of other religious affiliations and people outside Australia could also make submissions. A well-planned national promotion campaign was employed using various marketing tools including social media and print advertising in parish newsletters and diocesan magazines and newspapers to encourage participation from all around Australia.

Local coordinators were appointed in each diocese to promote participation in the Listening and Dialogue sessions that were held in Catholic parishes, schools, workplaces and community centres. Parishes, dioceses, schools, community and interest groups also encouraged participation through their websites and announcements at gatherings. Also, as the previous chapter described, a number of guides were prepared for coordinators and participants to ensure that this process was carried out in a consistent manner.

**Data Collection**

A significant part of the data collection for this project was through submissions made via the online portal on the Plenary Council website. The portal led to a survey administered using Qualtrics software. A copy of the survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix 8. A hard copy of the questionnaire was also made available to participants.

A number of submissions were collected in hard copy through letters, emails and printed questionnaires

that were distributed by parishes and dioceses. Most of these contributions provided responses to the main question. However some additional materials, such as books for recommended reading, were also sent in and collected for use in Phase 2 of the Plenary Council preparation process.

The Youth Guide available on the Plenary Council website offered an alternate form of the questionnaire based on the three main questions. A copy of this is available as Appendix 9. Some groups used this form to submit their responses directly rather than through the online portal.

At Christmas 2018, there was a campaign to encourage more voices to be heard through postcard-sized cards which were distributed through parishes. These 'Christmas cards' only included one question, "What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?" and did not request any demographic information. A sample of the Christmas card questionnaires can be found in Appendix 10.

Some groups used Christmas cards and survey forms with different questions from the three research questions (for example, "Would you like to see the possibility of a married ministerial priesthood introduced?"). These were considered out of the scope of the study and were not included in the analysis. Appendix 11 records a full list of alternate questions that were collected in this process. Hard copy submissions often did not request the same information as the online survey and therefore a complete demographic picture of participants in the study was not possible.

All hard copy submissions were collected, scanned or typed up, and stored in digital format, for use in the data analysis stage.

## Ethical Issues

A number of ethical issues regarding consent and the maintenance of privacy and confidentiality arose during the study. An application was made to the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Christian Research Association for the data analysis of this project. Ethics approval was provided in November 2018. A copy of this is available in Appendix 12.

### Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained at several levels in the online survey. Firstly, participation in the online survey was completely voluntary. Participants could choose whether they wished to participate in a group Listening and Dialogue session and contribute to an online group response or make a separate individual submission.

Not all groups and individuals participated in a Listening and Dialogue session, although people were encouraged to do so. At the beginning of the survey, each respondent was given the option to proceed with the survey without having participated in this session. Furthermore, people who had participated in a Listening and Dialogue session could also then make an individual submission if they chose. These steps ensured that each submission was voluntary and made with the best of intentions by each participant.

Participants consented to participate in the online survey by clicking a button at the beginning of the survey. The first page of the survey contained information for participants about the Plenary Council process and especially the Listening and Dialogue phase. At the end of the page, the following line appeared in order to obtain consent from participants prior to undertaking the survey:

*By clicking on the ‘ >> ’ button below you are consenting to participate in this survey.*

*If you do not want to continue, simply close your Internet browser.*

### Underage Submissions

Special care was taken in the project to ensure that any risk to participants aged under 16 years was minimised. At the beginning of the survey, an instruction was given that any child under the age of 13 would need one of their parents or guardians to complete the form on their behalf. Participants in this age group were then redirected to the end of the submission process.

Participants aged 13-15 years were prompted to provide their parent or guardian's email address. An email was then automatically sent to the parent or guardian, which sought consent for their child to participate in the study. Where no response was received, this process was followed up and repeated a few times.

Participants were informed that if consent was not received, their submission would be deleted. Once the checking and verification process had been completed, where consent was not provided, or no contact was able to be made, the response was then deleted.

A number of school groups sought parental permission prior to holding a Listening and Dialogue session and confirmation of this process was considered to be sufficient consent to include those responses.

### Maintenance of Confidentiality and Privacy

In keeping with ethics guidelines, the privacy of each participant was protected under the Privacy Act 1988. Due to the personal and detailed nature of the submissions, consent was sought to conduct any follow-up consultation and for publishing of the findings.

Care was taken, therefore, to obtain informed consent from each participant or group/organisation in three distinct areas. Firstly, whether they wished to have a member of the Plenary Council team contact them about their submission. Secondly, informed consent was obtained for the publishing of their de-identified submission online, via the Plenary Council website or through social media. De-identification is the process used to prevent a person's identity from being revealed. In this survey, this meant that all names, locations and other identifying information were removed prior to the response being used. Finally, consent was also sought for sharing their de-identified submission with their diocese. In keeping with these guidelines therefore, care was taken to ensure that quotes from people who did not consent to the publication and sharing of their responses were not included in this report.

The data from all the submissions were stored on secured, password-protected computers in the NCPR office and hard copy submissions held in cabinets in a locked room in the NCPR office.

Confidentiality of the majority of participants was maintained by ensuring that only de-identified data was reported and no individual could be identified in any report or publication arising from the research. Given the nature of the Plenary Council project, in some cases, however, it was desirable that participants be identified. Examples of these were when participant quotes were needed for the website or for special reports. In these cases, where participants had indicated that they were happy to be contacted by the Plenary Council team, this contact was made and another level of consent was sought for their submission and identifying details to be made public.

## Data Processing and Analysis

Data processing commenced with a thorough “cleaning of the data”. In this process, unusable submissions (where the respondent did not answer any of the three questions) were deleted. There was also a process arranged to handle multiple submissions from individual participants. These submissions were identified by checking individual details such as the name, email, location and IP address of respondents. In these cases, every subsequent submission was linked to the first one. When a person sent in an exact duplicate submission, either intentionally or unintentionally, those subsequent duplicate submissions were deleted. This process did not affect group or individual submissions that were sent in by a single representative, for example, by a parish secretary or a local coordinator who was submitting on behalf of several participants.

For the analysis, all key identifiers in the form of names, contact details and other information were removed from the data.

Due consideration was also given to the weighting of the data. Weighting is a process generally used with statistical data, where the researcher assigns an adjustment weight to each survey respondent to reduce bias. Persons in under-represented categories get a weight larger than 1, and those in over-represented groups get a weight smaller than 1. This process adjusts the results of a study to bring them more in line with the known population.

After consultation with the research task group, it was decided that it was not possible to weight any one submission over another. There were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, Plenary Council submissions were not representative of any groups, rather they were self-selected. Secondly, weighting would have undermined the main purpose and



intention of the Plenary process which was “to listen to all the voices”. Another reason was because not every group had provided their total number of members, making it impossible to quantify them. Most importantly, the research task group identified that, for this project, weighting had the potential to increase bias rather than reduce it. Therefore, each submission was read, coded and treated the same no matter if it was a group submission of 17,000 people or an individual one.

SPSS statistical software was used for the demographic analysis and to prepare tables and graphs. The qualitative analysis of the responses was largely aided by the use of NVivo, a software tool that assists in data organisation and management, data exploration and the formulation of queries. Data from the online survey was uploaded into NVivo. Other data in the form of scanned documents, cards, letters, reports and books, along with visual images and audio files, was also incorporated into NVivo and a comprehensive process of data coding and identification of themes was undertaken.

## Content Analysis

The responses to the three main questions were analysed using what is known in social science as thematic analysis. Once the content is coded, thematic analysis allows researchers to aggregate similar codes to form major concepts or themes. This method allows the data to “speak for itself”, with themes emerging from the “discussions” and “conversations”.

The coding structure of themes emerged from a reading of the first few thousand submissions answering the main question: What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time? Subsequent submissions were coded to existing

themes or to new ones as required. At the end of April 2019, thematic saturation was reached, which meant that no new themes were emerging from the data.

Submissions varied a great deal and participants’ opinions were diverse on a wide array of topics. More than 120 themes emerged from the data. These were grouped into 14 topics for ease of organisation. An analysis of these themes is provided in chapters 4–17 of this report. A list of all the themes can be found in Appendix 13.

## Limitations of the Research

As with every research project, there are limitations to the data collected and how it can be analysed. The Plenary Council survey questionnaire had a particular limitation associated with the main question asked of participants: What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

The analysis revealed that some participants clearly had difficulty in interpreting the word “God” meaningfully. Some examples of their responses are as follows:

*I think this is a naive question, which suggests a simplistic notion of god and god’s relationship to us.*

*He is just a fairy tale.*

*I think this question is somewhat presumptuous. I do not believe we are able to know what God thinks, wants or asks.*

*What makes you think it has to want something?*

A number of participants also interpreted the word “us” in different ways, some of which are described below with examples from the data:

- **I, me** - *God is asking me to make him a priority as the bustle and fast pace of modern society takes over. However, I find it very difficult to do so in Mass.*
- **This small group, our family** - *We are one group of 5 in a larger group of 20. Our key response was ‘To try to understand why the Church as it is now has lost relevance for so many - in our lives, in our community and for humanity so that we can be open to letting God out of the boxes we’ve put God in and allow our big God to work in us for the good of the world.’*
- **This church building** - *I would like it a little bit larger so we can fit more people within the space. I would also want air conditioners for warm days.*
- **This parish, group of parishes** - *I would prefer that everyone didn’t have to hold hands during the Our Father in the Youth Mass.*
- **This diocese** - *To form a cooperative structure of bishop, priests, religious and laity to lead and oversight the leadership and management of the Church. This could be done by a group of people working together as a Pastoral Council of the Diocese or as a group of 6 or 8 on an elected ‘Board’.*
- **This community (e.g. members of a particular organisation)** - *We, members of Women’s —, support the Plenary Council ... What we think God is asking of us in Australia today—God speaks to us through the signs of the times. Signs of the times: Thousands of lay women have degrees in theology with expertise in teaching, communication and spiritual direction ... Therefore, [what] God is asking is that the voices of women be heard, and their*

*expertise be accepted at all levels of the Church to shape the future of the Church we love.*

- **The Australian bishops** - *I think God is asking the Bishops to pay very close attention to what the laity [say] and not be closed minded as often is the case.*
- **The Catholic Church in Australia** - *I think God is asking the Catholic Church in Australia to be a champion in the push for change in Rome.*
- **Australia/Australians** - *God wants Australia to live in peace and harmony.*
- **The Catholic Church in Rome** - *That the Catholic Church in Rome be open to change & that they listen to & act on the discussion & recommendations initiated by the people.*
- **The universal Church, All Catholics in general** - *I think God is asking the Church, i.e. the People of God to recognise that we need to be humble, listen and seeking healing for the damage done in the name of Christ to brothers and sisters.*

The scope of the research did not allow for each of these interpretations to be analysed separately. However, care was taken in interpreting the data as a whole and in writing the report. The authors advise readers to keep these interpretations in mind when reading the responses of participants contained in the subsequent sections of this report. Caution is also advised regarding the weight of opinion on a certain issue as the research did not enable everyone to provide an opinion on every topic.



3

THE PARTICIPANTS

A total of 17,457 submissions were received from May 2018 until March 2019, as shown in Table 1. Of these, 9,690 respondents had participated in a Listening and Dialogue session (also known as a Listening and Dialogue Encounter). Another 2,113 were unsure if they had, so we presume they had not. Less than 26 per cent of the total number of respondents (4,402) indicated that they had not participated in a Listening and Dialogue session. About 1,252 respondents chose not to answer this question.

There were 629 multiple submissions detected during the period from May 2018 to March 2019. Where individuals or groups completed a submission more than once, every second and subsequent response was linked to the first one and treated as one submission only, to arrive at the final number of submissions. Once again, this process did not affect group or individual submissions that were sent in by a single representative, for example, by a parish secretary or a local diocesan coordinator who was submitting on behalf of several participants or for separate interest groups.

At the close of the survey, there were also 80 incomplete responses, with at least some usable data. These were also included in the final figure. Incomplete responses which did not have any usable data were deleted.

Of the 17,457 submissions, 4,699 were from groups or organisations and 12,758 submissions were from individuals. There were over 209,170 people represented through the 4,699 groups, bringing the total number of participants in the Listening and Dialogue phase to more than 222,000.

Since the survey went online in May 2018, there were significant increases in the number of submissions received each month. The process of “cleaning the data” (by deleting invalid responses or combining multiple responses), after the survey closed on 13 March 2019, meant that the final figures for each month were somewhat lower than what was observed during the process.

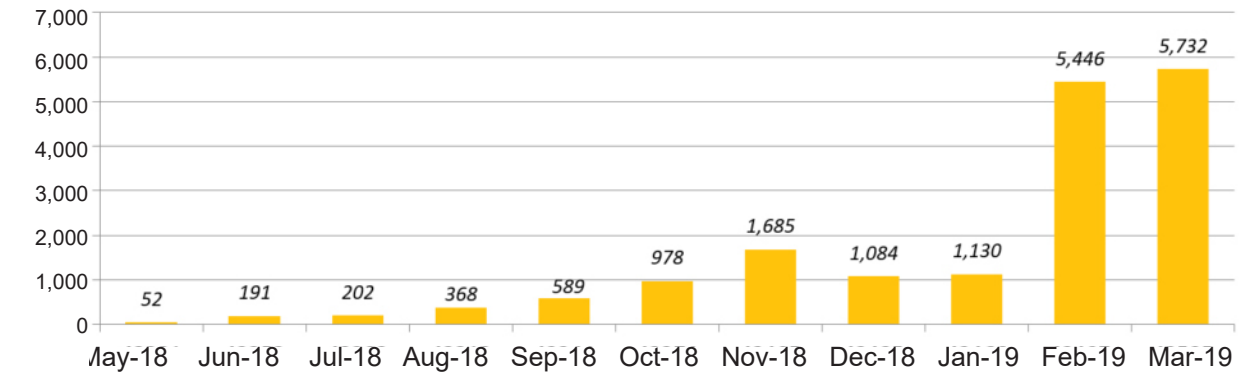
Figure 1 shows the final number of submissions received since May 2018. The highest number of submissions in 2018 were received in the month of November (1,685). However, this figure was far surpassed in March 2019 when 5,732 submissions were received from 1-13 March alone.

The combined number of submissions received in February and March 2019 was 11,178, which represented about 64 per cent of the total submissions received during the entire Listening and Dialogue phase.

Table 1: Number of Submissions

Total number of submissions received	17,457
Participated in Listening & Dialogue Encounter?	
Yes	9,690
No	4,402
Not sure	2,113
Not stated	1,252
Continued with submission process	17,457
Submissions received from groups or organisations	4,699
Submissions received from individuals	12,758
Total	17,457

Fig. 1: Number of monthly submissions from May 2018 to March 2019





DIOCESAN SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

The Plenary Council questionnaire did not ask respondents for the diocese in which they were located. However, it asked respondents to type in their postcode. These postcodes were used as a basis for the diocesan analysis. This meant that only geographical dioceses were able to be identified using this method.

Table 2 shows the number of responses per diocese. Figure 2 is a graphical representation of the same data. Every diocese made at least 50 submissions. The highest number of submissions (2,440) was received from the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Other dioceses from which over a thousand submissions each were received included Brisbane (2,269), Perth (1,601), Sydney (1,550), Wollongong (1,451) and Parramatta (1,038).

Individual Responses from Dioceses

At least 35 individual submissions were received from every geographical diocese. The highest number of individual submissions (1,890) was received from the Archdiocese of Brisbane followed by the Archdiocese of Melbourne (1,649). Other dioceses from which more than 1,000 individual submissions each were received were Wollongong (1,244), Sydney (1,103) and Perth (1,082).

Over 350 individual submissions were received from each of the dioceses of Parramatta, Broken Bay and Adelaide. About 1,227 individual respondents did not provide an identifiable location.

Group Responses from Dioceses

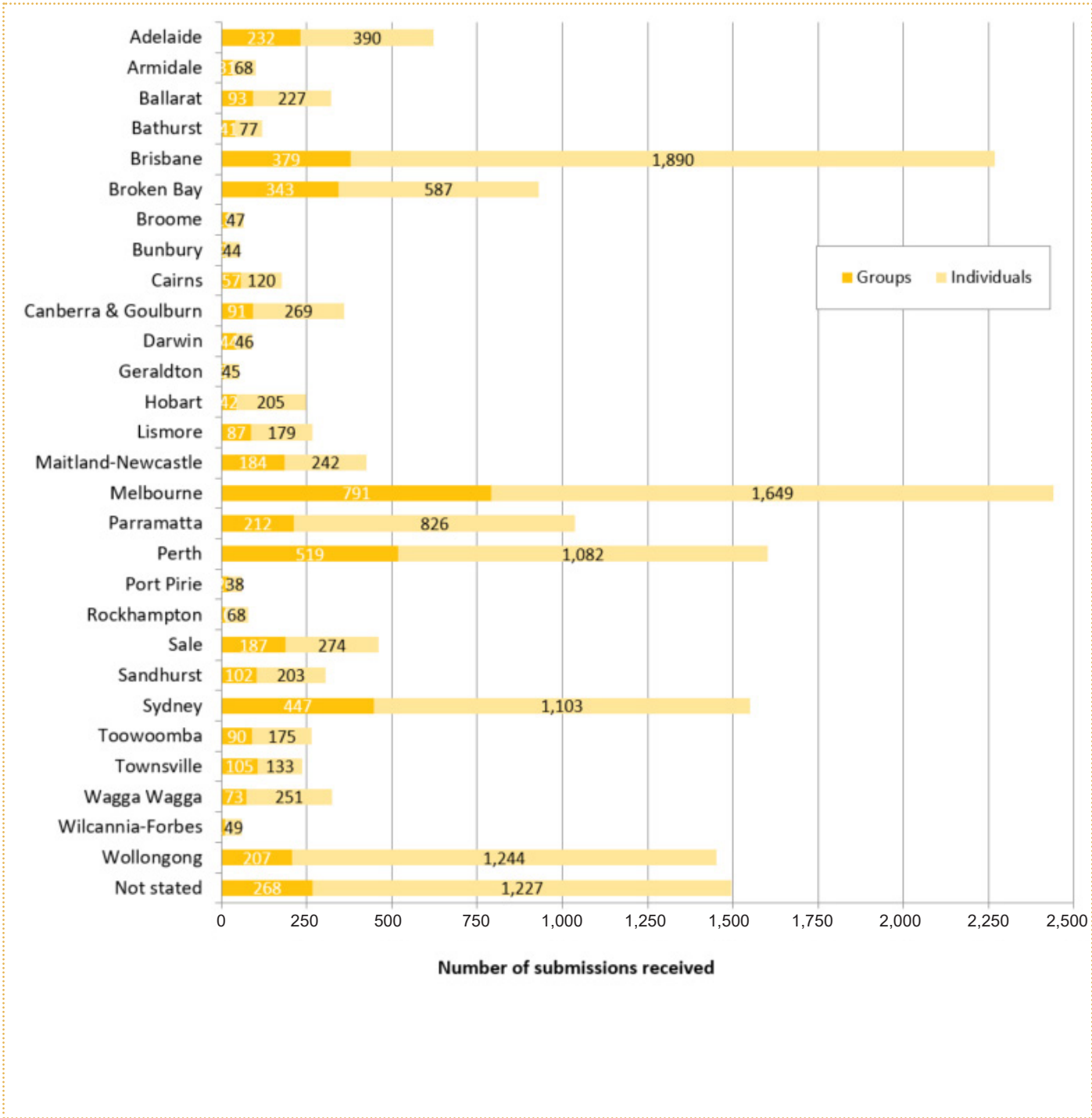
The highest number of group submissions (791) was received from the Archdiocese of Melbourne, followed by the Archdiocese of Perth (519). Other dioceses from each of which more than 300 group

submissions were received were Sydney (447), Brisbane (379) and Broken Bay (343).

More than 200 group responses were received from each of the dioceses of Adelaide, Parramatta and Wollongong. A total of 268 group respondents did not provide an identifiable location.

Table 2: Diocesan Summary (based on postcode)			
Diocese	Individuals	Groups	Total
Adelaide	390	232	622
Armidale	68	31	99
Ballarat	227	93	320
Bathurst	77	41	118
Brisbane	1,890	379	2,269
Broken Bay	587	343	930
Broome	47	18	65
Bunbury	44	9	53
Cairns	120	57	177
Canberra & Goulburn	269	91	360
Darwin	46	44	90
Geraldton	45	6	51
Hobart	205	42	247
Lismore	179	87	266
Maitland-Newcastle	242	184	426
Melbourne	1,649	791	2,440
Parramatta	826	212	1,038
Perth	1,082	519	1,601
Port Pirie	38	20	58
Rockhampton	68	10	78
Sale	274	187	461
Sandhurst	203	102	305
Sydney	1,103	447	1,550
Toowoomba	175	90	265
Townsville	133	105	238
Wagga Wagga	251	73	324
Wilcannia-Forbes	49	11	60
Wollongong	1,244	207	1,451
Not stated	1,227	268	1,495
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,758</b>	<b>4,699</b>	<b>17,457</b>

Fig. 2: Responses from each diocese



## INDIVIDUAL SUBMISSIONS

At the close of the survey on 13 March 2019, a total of 12,758 individual submissions had been received. Most of these were made through the online portal. However, a large number of submissions were also received through letters, emails and the Christmas card campaign.

### Age of Participants

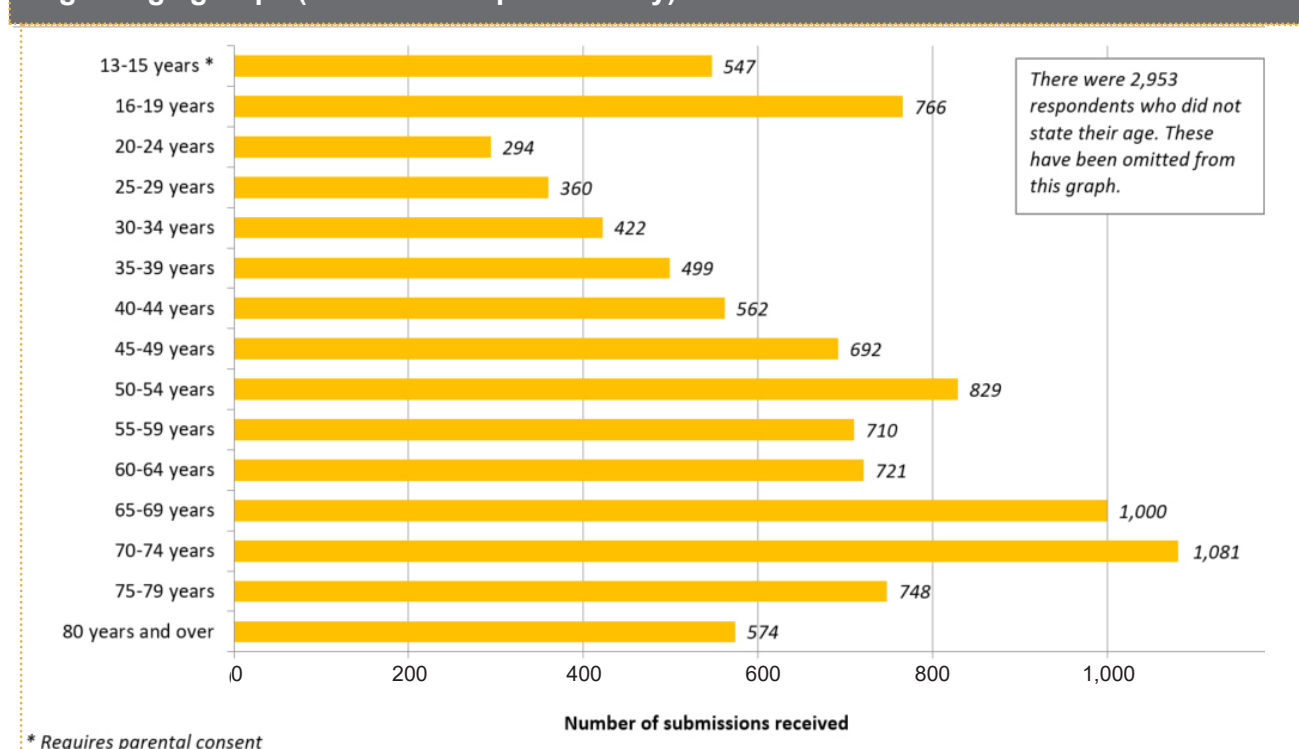
Figure 3 shows the age groups of individual participants. About 44 per cent (5,663) were received from those aged 50 and over. The most number of submissions within this age range was received from the 70-74 years age group (1,081 responses). The other group from which a large number of responses (1,000) was received was the 65-69 years age group.

At the close of submissions, there was a total of 1,607 submissions received from those aged under 25. This represented almost 14 per cent of the total number of participants.

Participants aged 16-17 were encouraged to discuss the questionnaire with their parent or guardian. The 16-19 years age group had the highest number of responses in the 'under 25' category with a total of 766 responses. Many of these came from schools that sent in their responses through the online portal.

As Figure 3 shows, there were 547 individual submissions received from participants in the 13-15 years age group.

Fig. 3: Age groups (individual responses only)



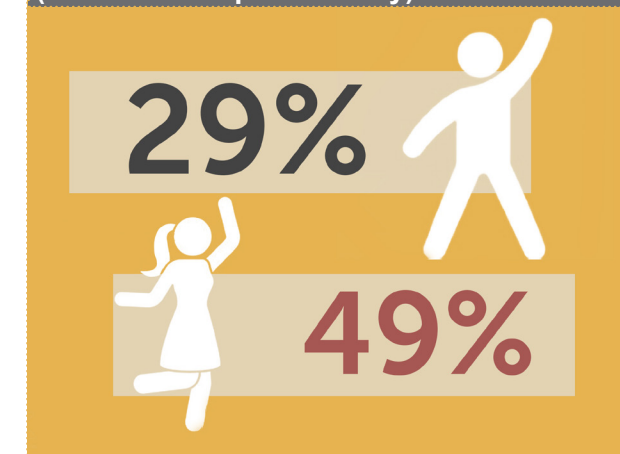
### Sex of Participants

Around half the number of all individual participants were female, while a further 30 per cent were male (see Figure 4). Table 3 shows that there were 3,701 men and 6,219 women who made submissions. Four hundred and thirty-two participants preferred not to state their sex, while 2,406 participants did not answer this question.

Table 3: Sex (individual responses only)

Female	6,219
Male	3,701
Prefer not to say	432
Not stated	2,406
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,758</b>

Fig. 4: Percentage of male and female (individual responses only)



### Countries of Birth

Table 4a on the next page shows the country of birth of individual participants. As expected, a large number of participants (65%) were born in Australia. Just under 16 per cent came from other countries, while around 19 per cent did not state their birthplace.

The top five countries of participants born overseas were the United Kingdom (including Northern Ireland), the Philippines, India, New Zealand and Ireland. For ease of analysis, countries from each of which there were less than 15 participants were grouped together in the 'Other Countries' category. This category included participants from more than 95 different countries such as Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Iceland and Mali, amongst many others.

Table 4b provides a summary of the countries of birth, while Tables 4c and 4d show the countries of birth of the participants' mothers and fathers respectively.

A full list of countries can be found in Appendix 14 at the end of this report.



Table 4a: Countries of birth (individual responses only)	N	%
Australia	8,335	65.3
Austria	16	0.1
Brazil	19	0.1
Canada	21	0.2
Egypt	16	0.1
Germany	38	0.3
Hong Kong (S.A.R.)	32	0.3
India	172	1.3
Indonesia	36	0.3
Iraq	17	0.1
Ireland	102	0.8
Italy	68	0.5
Lebanon	24	0.2
Malaysia	85	0.7
Malta	47	0.4
Mauritius	22	0.2
Netherlands	92	0.7
New Zealand	112	0.9
Philippines	180	1.4
Poland	28	0.2
Singapore	36	0.3
South Africa	73	0.6
Sri Lanka	55	0.4
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	338	2.6
United States of America	59	0.5
Vietnam	20	0.2
Zimbabwe	19	0.1
Other Countries	321	2.5
Not stated	2,375	18.6
Total	12,758	100

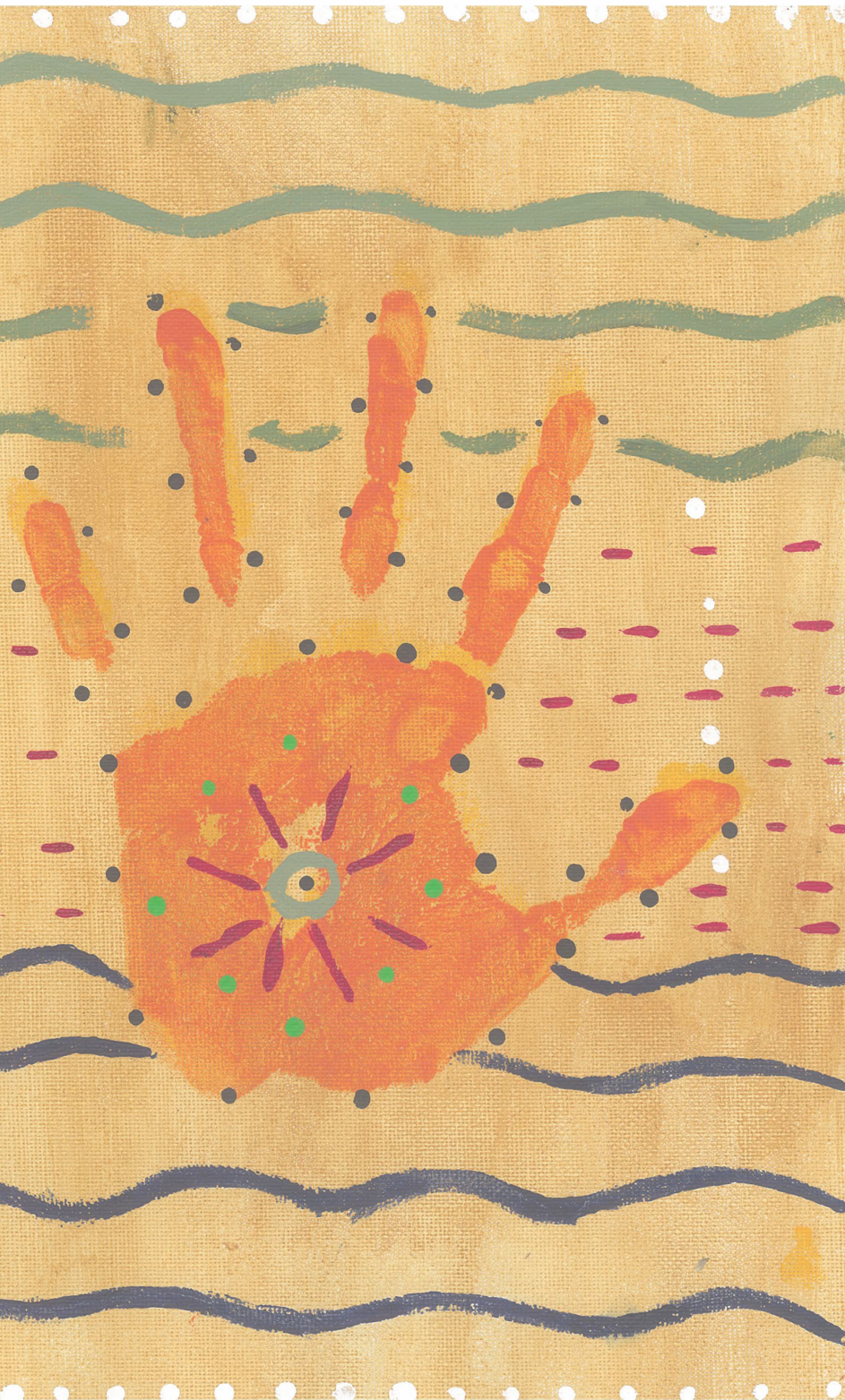
Table 4b: Countries of birth — summary (individual responses only)	N	%
Australia	8,335	65.3
Other English-speaking country	705	5.5
Non-English-speaking country	1,343	10.5
Not stated	2,375	18.6
Total	12,758	100

Table 4c: Mother's country of birth (individual responses only)	N	%
Australia	6,057	47.5
Other English-speaking country	909	7.1
Non-English-speaking country	2,206	17.3
Not stated	3,586	28.1
Total	12,758	100

Table 4d: Father's country of birth (individual responses only)	N	%
Australia	5,770	45.2
Other English-speaking country	1,022	8.0
Non-English-speaking country	2,334	18.3
Not stated	3,632	28.5
Total	12,758	100

Note: 'Other English-speaking country' refers to Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States.





*Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander Australians*

Table 5 shows the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who made submissions. At the close of submissions there were 143 individuals who identified themselves as such, representing just over one per cent of all individual participants.

Table 5: Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians (individual responses only)	
Yes	143
No	9,458
Not stated	3,157
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,758</b>

*Religion of Participants*

Table 6 shows the religion of individual participants. Of the total 12,758 individual submissions that were received, 9,195 participants (72%) were Catholic. One hundred and twenty-eight participants were Anglican, 73 were Orthodox and 33 were from the Uniting Church. There were five or more participants each from the Baptist, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Presbyterian and Reformed, Churches of Christ and the Salvation Army churches.

A small number of participants (114) were from non-Christian faiths. These included Islam (34), Buddhism (15) and Hinduism (10). About 2,773 individual participants did not state their religion, while 312 participants chose the 'no religion' response.

For those who indicated they were Catholic, a further question asked them to describe their participation in church activities. Their responses are shown in Table 7. A total of 6,951 participants indicated that they went to Mass regularly and were involved in other church activities. There were 1,160 participants who said they went to Mass and church activities sometimes, while a further 531 participants considered themselves Catholic but were not involved in church activities or described their participation in other terms. A further 553 participants described themselves in another way or did not answer the question.

Table 6: Religion (individual responses only)

Catholic	9,195
Other Christian:	
Anglican	128
Baptist	23
Churches of Christ	6
Lutheran	8
Orthodox	73
Pentecostal	16
Presbyterian and Reformed	5
Salvation Army	7
Uniting Church	33
Other Christian	65
Non Christian:	
Buddhism	15
Hinduism	10
Islam	34
Sikhism	6
Other religion	49
No religion	312
Not stated	2,773
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,758</b>

Table 7: Religious description (for those who answered 'Catholic' to previous question)	Female	Male	Not stated	Total
I am Catholic and regularly attend Mass and other church activities	3,920	2,800	231	6,951
I am Catholic and go to Mass and church activities sometimes	841	279	40	1,160
I am Catholic, but I don't practise or get involved in anything	192	44	17	253
I consider myself Catholic but I am not sure what to think about the Catholic faith	200	63	15	278
Other	241	144	28	413
Not Stated	67	48	25	140
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,461</b>	<b>3,378</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>9,195</b>



GROUP SUBMISSIONS

At the close of the survey on 13 March 2019, there were a total of 4,699 group submissions received. Around 209,170 individuals were represented through these groups. However, there were 446 groups that did not report their number of participating members, indicating that the total number of people represented through the group submissions may be considerably higher.

While three-quarters of group submissions provided a group name, around 1,194 did not do so. Table 8 shows a list of the largest groups with 2,000 or more members. The number of participating members was provided by the person submitting the group response. These figures could not be checked for accuracy.

Prominent among the largest groups was Catholic Social Services Victoria with around 17,000 members. There were also a number of large parish groups such as Holy Spirit Parish, Amaroo (Canberra & Goulburn) with 11,000 participants, and Our Lady of the Angels, Rouse Hill (Parramatta) with 5,000 members. There were six other groups from Melbourne, Perth and Canberra & Goulburn dioceses with 2,000 members or more.

Table 8: Groups with 2,000 members or more		
Name of group	Group size	Diocese
Catholic Social Services Victoria	17,000	Melbourne
Holy Spirit Parish, Amaroo	11,000	Canberra & Goulburn
Passionist Family Group Movement	7,200	Canberra & Goulburn
St Mary MacKillop College	6,000	Canberra & Goulburn
The Parish of St Martin de Porres, Avondale Heights	5,700	Melbourne
The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum	5,000	Melbourne
Our Lady of the Angels, Rouse Hill	5,000	Parramatta
Australian Catholic Students Association	4,500	Not stated
St Vincent de Paul Society Australia	4,000	Melbourne
St Nicholas Parish, Tamworth	2,300	Armidale
The Apostles of Perpetual Adoration	2,000	Perth
St John Bosco’s Parish, Niddrie	2,000	Melbourne

Age and Sex of Group Members

On 5 November 2018, a question was added to the online survey asking group participants to indicate the ages of those represented in their group. Not all groups answered this question. Therefore, the results presented here reflect only the submissions of those groups which provided information on this question between 5 November 2018 and 13 March 2019. Table 9 shows the ages of group members for those submissions.

The 50-69 years age group was the largest group represented with 45,815 members. This was followed by the group aged 30-49 years with 30,493 members. No ages were provided for around 57,770 group members.

Of the total 209,170 group members, 50 per cent (105,068) were female and 41 per cent (84,771) were male (see Table 10). A further nine per cent (19,331) did not state their sex.

Table 9: Age groups (group responses only)

Aged under 20	28,944
Aged 20-29	18,625
Aged 30-49	30,493
Aged 50-69	45,815
Aged 70 and over	27,523
Not stated	57,770
Total	209,170

Table 10: Sex (group responses only)

Female	105,068
Male	84,771
Not stated	19,331
Total	209,170

RECOMMENDED READING

An initial quantitative summary containing analysis of the demographic characteristics of individuals and groups who participated in the ‘Listening and Dialogue’ stage of the Plenary Council.

*Dantis, Trudy, Paul Howell and Stephen Reid. 2019. “Summary of Submissions May 2018 – March 2019: A Report to the Plenary Council Executive Committee”. ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)*



# LOVE GOD, LOVE NEIGHBOUR

One of the most common answers to the question “What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?” was “to love God and love neighbour”. Participants felt passionately that there should be a greater focus on Jesus Christ and the Word of God, and greater trust, faith and hope in God. There were also a number of responses that identified the need for Catholics to keep the faith, keep and honour all the commandments and be a witness in society to the Catholic faith. There were significant numbers of responses calling for greater love, kindness, respect and care for our neighbours. Finally, there were calls to remain faithful to Church teaching, to have a renewed call to holiness and to have greater support for faith formation.

When participants spoke about loving God and loving neighbour, they demonstrated the need to “rediscover” and “rebuild” our relationship with God and others so that, as one participant explained, “everything we do, either collectively or individually, is underpinned, informed by and filled with that love”. For many, the answer to the question was as simple as “getting back to the basics”.

*Each of us is being called to build our relationship with God (who is pouring His love upon us) and to build our relationships with one another (regardless of differences in background). So, we are being called to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbour as we do ourselves (Mark 12:28-34).*

*God is asking us to get back to the basics with His message: Love God with your whole being; Love your neighbour as yourself. Focus on building the Kingdom of God instead of building our own small little kingdoms. Pray without ceasing; practise fasting with purpose; give until there is nothing left...*

Keeping  
the  
faith

Better faith  
formation

Keeping the  
commandments

Greater trust,  
faith and hope  
in God

Renewed  
call to  
holiness

Greater focus  
on  
Jesus Christ

Greater focus  
on the  
Word of God

Remaining faithful  
to Church  
teaching

Care for  
neighbour

Being a witness  
in society

*The call of Christ to His body has never changed. He asks her always and everywhere to be His faithful bride: repenting and turning afresh to our Lord; carrying on His work of reconciliation of man with God and man with each other; living out the Gospel that ‘the Kingdom of God has come near’ by laying down our lives in hope of the resurrection ... In short, Christ calls us, always, to live out the command to love God and love neighbour. This is an arduous calling and possible only through the grace of God and the sharing of gifts within His Church.*

There were many themes relating to God, faith and neighbour that were highlighted within these responses. These are discussed in detail in the following sections.

## Greater Trust, Faith and Hope in God

Persistence in relying on and increasing our faith and hope in God was a strong theme in a number of participants’ responses. Many spoke of a need to “be calm and full of hope” especially at a time of turmoil. Others believed God was calling all people to “come back to Him” and “renew their relationship with Him” so that they could know “true peace, love and happiness”.

*God is asking us all to return to Him and give Him priority in our lives. To love Him with all of our hearts, souls, and minds. To worship and thank Him as Jesus taught us. To honour our traditions. To teach all Catholics the deeper truths of our faith. To be truthful, honest and transparent to all, regardless of how ‘unpopular’ it may be in today’s world.*

*We hear God remind us that he is always there for us, always watching over us and*



*we must rely on Him. We must give young people guidance to get back to church, spread the faith, and love God in our lives.*

*God is asking us as a whole “Come back to me with all your hearts”. There is not enough passion and commitment in us Catholics following the teachings given to us in the Bible by Jesus ... and God wants to invite all of us young and old back into relationship with Him, to know Him as He truly is, to love Him with heart, soul and mind and to serve Him (to give without counting the cost) only Him.*

There was a genuine concern that people were “not following God’s ways” and had “abandoned Him”. Therefore, “putting Him first” and making God “the centre of our lives and the core of our being” were some ways through which people believed everyone could renew faith in God. As one participant explained:

*Faithful intimacy with Him, honest acceptance of the need to find meaning through relationship with the divine, a sense of sacredness in a world that has lost its sense of purpose and meaning, God is asking us to find meaning in relation with Him.*

Other ways of building a relationship with God were by “genuine prayer”, having “daily gratitude and thanksgiving for God’s grace, mercy and forgiveness”, becoming “more aware of His presence” and being “open to the Holy Spirit”. Also included were by “following His will”, becoming “good and faithful servants”, “relinquishing the need for power and control over others”, nurturing and learning about the faith and by following God’s commandments.

## Greater Focus on Jesus Christ

Along with belief and faith in God, participants also had a strong belief that greater focus on the person of Jesus Christ and his teachings was important:

*To be faithful to Jesus Christ, to cling to Him as the Way, the Truth and the Life, to be faithful disciples.*

Being Christ’s disciples meant imitating Him in our words and actions. A number of participants spoke of the need for each person to assume responsibility for supporting the mission of Christ through their individual behaviour, relationships with others and with the wider community. For some, this meant staying true to the teachings of Christ through the Church and the Magisterium:

*He [God] is asking the same as always, namely, to take up our cross and follow His son, Jesus Christ, who became man ... who died and rose from death through love for us, and who intercedes for us before Him. To embrace the beauty and necessity of His one, true Church and the faith that leads to prayer ... to pray for the gift of wisdom through the Scriptures and to seek the truth and freedom for excellence through His Son, Jesus Christ. To accept that truth is truth even when it is unpopular.*

*The answer to the question is and always has been constant: to preach fully and truly the Truth about Jesus Christ, i.e. the whole authentically Catholic message about sin, repentance, worship and salvation and the striving for holiness.*

For others, following Christ meant having greater love and acceptance of all people.

*God asks us to be faithful to the teachings of Jesus. As we face many challenges in our Church and community, we are the face of Christ. This means that we are to act with justice. We are to be transformational in our actions and we are open and transparent. We need not be afraid to stand up for what is good, and how we interact with others should promote inclusivity, welcome and to listen with the ear of our heart.*

*Our wounded hierarchical Church needs to return to the discipleship of Jesus to create a culture of inclusivity, letting go of its sense of superiority, privilege and power. Many are hurting in our Church where they are voiceless and there is no place for dialogue or to express what they have experienced nor their needs ... We need a compassionate Church which portrays the acceptance and love of Jesus our model!*

Although there were differences of opinion, all participants agreed that there was a greater need to follow Christ more closely and make visible His presence through the Church and its members in the wider community. For some a “personal encounter with Christ” was paramount to achieving this. For others, following the mission of Christ—“to repent and believe in God’s Kingdom” and “to love and serve others” was the way forward.

## Greater Focus on the Word of God

Building a stronger relationship with Christ is possible through reading the Scriptures and immersing ourselves in the Word of God and for many participants this was of prime importance:

*The Word of God is so important ... to enlighten our history and our concrete reality. To remind us constantly of the love of God for us and to listen to His voice, to give us discernment [for] all events of our lives.*

*The Catholic Church has a three-year cycle of its Bible readings on a daily basis and our reading and reflecting on these each day is recommended as an excellent way of developing our individual understanding and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.*

There were a number of recommendations made for Scripture to be taught in schools and religion classes and for people to be encouraged to read the Bible.

*I believe that the Lord is calling us back to basics. To be open to unlearn and hear the Gospel afresh again which requires a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit to be able to hear the Good News anew ... I think we’ve been somewhat lost as a result of not being encouraged in the past to have Scripture central to our daily bread. We as Catholics are always encouraged to receive the sacraments. It’s something always focused upon, but rarely are we encouraged to meditate on Scripture.*

Several participants encouraged people to pray and reflect on the Gospels and asked for all parishes to provide more opportunities for prayer, Scripture reading and sharing of the faith. Others felt that homilists needed to apply Scripture to daily life to make the Word of God real for people. Overall, there was a sincere call to “live by God’s Word” and to:

*[e]ngage with the Scriptures more deeply gaining knowledge and wisdom from them, allowing them to form and transform our lives, giving us courage and hope.*

There were also calls to “preach the Gospel”, “follow the Gospel message of love” and “live out Gospel values” in daily life.

### Remaining Faithful to Church Teaching / Keeping the Commandments

A large number of participants asked the Catholic community to continue to remain faithful to the teachings of the Church. They believed that the Church in Australia was “declining morally” or, as one participant termed it, “going through a time of mass heresy and confusion”, especially amidst the breakdown of marriage and family in society.

Catholics needed to remain faithful to the teachings of the Church at such a time:

*I believe God is asking us as Catholics to not give up! Our world has changed around us and Australia has become an affluent country however, there is still poverty and misery around the globe ... God is asking us to care and to pray more. He is asking us to pick up our crosses and follow him. Our Church needs to stop being so ‘politically correct’ and return to a religion of truth. People are fooling themselves and allowing sin to take hold of them through apathy and ignorance ... We are Catholics living in a secular society. That isn’t easy but we need to be strong and not give up into this form of life that has infiltrated society.*

Many participants spoke out against the “watering down” of the faith and “ambiguous preaching”. They

saw a need for Catholics to defend the truth of the Gospel, be “counter-cultural” and “beacons of shining light” to the wider community. This was true for both lay people and leaders alike.

*I believe that God is asking us to be faithful to the truth and to be in the world but not of the world. God wants us to put His will first always and to be guided by tradition ... Religious leaders need to trust Him more and have less fear of what people think. There is very little talk of sin or hell but Our Lord mentioned these many times. We need to imitate the saints who have shown us what we need to be.*

*Too many ‘Catholics’ are focusing on political correctness, or social causes, or excessive ‘positivism’ ... in fact, pretty much anything bar having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and being led by His Spirit. We need a Church that speaks the Truth with love, not a Church that embraces feminism, socialism, pluralism, indeed every ‘ism’ except the rich Truth of Catholicism!*

Several mentioned the need for staying faithful to the teachings of the Ten Commandments:

*The 10 Commandments need to be encouraged and spoken about regularly. Living our lives with the Commandments as our guide will ensure that we develop a relationship with God, respect for life and thereby influence society.*

Many people within this group of respondees spoke out against practices such as abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage. Some also voiced their protests against individuals or groups who attempted to ignore, silence or persecute people

who spoke about and taught the hard truths of the faith.

A large number of participants specifically defended Church teachings on marriage, family and sexual ethics and called for others to do the same:

*We have a responsibility to explain the Catholic viewpoint on these issues, clearly, fearlessly and regularly, especially regarding the now publicly accepted issues of in-vitro fertilisation, same sex marriage ... and also on issues which are now becoming possible, such as human genetic engineering.*

*We believe that the Church should not shy away from big moral issues such as homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, same sex marriage, contraception, etc., but be bold in speaking the truth. With our secular culture being more influential on our youth than ever, we feel that there needs to be more programs for youth in Catholic schools and parishes that discuss sexuality, celibacy and Catholic moral issues in general.*

*Restore the beauty of authentic fatherhood. Fathers need to be present for their families and play the key role in leading their families to heaven.*

### Keeping the Faith

In a similar vein to remaining faithful to Church teaching, a number of participants were concerned about those who were disillusioned by the Church in recent times and were choosing to abandon their faith. The sexual abuse crisis and Royal Commission have been a time of testing for many



Catholics and parish communities. Participants spoke about the need to remain steadfast in faith through these times of turmoil. There were calls for people to “stay the course”, “keep praying and going to church” and to avoid feeling discouraged or falling into despair:

*These are dark days for the Catholic Church in Australia with an increasingly secular society ... I think people are questioning the relevance of Catholicism to their every-day lives. The history of child abuse and cover up, facilitated by an arrogant belief in absolute power amongst leaders in the Church, has done much damage to the reputation of the Church ... I believe that God is setting us a test of faith and a test of leadership: whether (a) Australian Catholics are able to bear witness to their faith in times of negative sentiment and (b) whether the Catholic leadership are able to turn around the negativity, atone for the wrongs that were done in the past and put in place a better organisation that truly practises what it preaches and is relevant to modern-day society. [We need] to support one another through these difficult times. To support our religious. To listen and be open with each one, especially with those who have had negative experiences in our Church.*

Many recommendations were made for people to stay connected; these included continuing to be actively involved in the parish, promoting the good works of the Church and working towards building strong, interactive parish communities. Other suggestions were choosing to be a witness in society and acting out Christian values in the community, especially staying mindful of those who were lonely or less fortunate, avoiding gossiping,

slandering others within the Church and blaming past Church leaders, and refocusing on the formation of young people.

## Being a Witness in Society

For many participants, loving God and neighbour meant professing a living faith and being a witness in society. Several commented on the fact that they believed God was asking all Catholics to take a stronger position in declaring the faith to the wider community. As one participant explained, “I believe God is asking us to pick ourselves up, brush off this dust and move on with our heads held high”.

*There is more to being Catholic than going to Mass: people need to fully live their faith through not only the Mass (worship); but also through serving (ministry); participation (community); growing in faith (discipleship); and reaching out beyond the community (evangelisation).*

*To let those around us know and see the love of Christ in what we do, to live good Christian lives and in doing so to demonstrate our love of Christ and of neighbour.*

Participants spoke of the need to “bravely proclaim the faith in word and deed”, “live by example” and “bring Christ’s presence to the communities we live in”. Several quoted the Scripture passage from Micah 6:8 which summed up this teaching: “to live justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with God”.

Apart from speaking and acting in a Christ-like manner, for many, being a witness also meant working for change in society and being more

proactive in the public sphere about religious matters:

*God is asking us to be change-makers. To challenge our society as it is for a better world. For family, this means holding true to our Church’s teachings, but to listen and appreciate others’ points of view. To not be condescending, implied or not, when we respond ... it is essential we continue to challenge laws around abortion and to continually approach our community with a rights-centred view on this i.e. the rights of the child, woman and father. It is not trendy to be pro-life and we need to continually challenge the secular society we live in with the Gospel messages on love, of life, family and children.*

*I think God continues to call the Church in Australia to live in accordance with Jesus Christ’s example. He is asking us to continue making the Church relevant to the lives of Australians, particularly those who are disadvantaged. He is asking us to continue to be positive witnesses for the faith and to help ensure that this is reflected in our communities. He is also asking us to reflect upon the Church’s recent failings and to address these in a real and sincere way. In addressing these challenges, I believe God asks us to display courage and a willingness to consider embracing change when this is necessary for dealing with the contemporary world.*

Advocating for justice, accompanying those in need, living a sacramental life reflective of faith, hope and love, living with honesty and integrity and being courageous were some examples participants gave of being witnesses in the wider society. Others spoke about being “the light of the world and salt of

the earth” and “the face, hands and feet of Jesus” and a visible and attractive sign of the joy of the Gospel.

## Renewed Call to Holiness

A large group of participants responded to the question by advocating for people in the Church to return to more prayer and holiness. Repentance for sins and conversion of heart were the two most talked about issues within this group. Many felt this was a personal invitation for them, while for others, it was a general call for all lay people and leaders alike:

*In brief, it [the call] would be to be holy. Digging into what Christ has always asked of the Church from the beginning of time. Radical love and evangelisation. There is a huge tradition in the Church of this and little more would be needed than the rediscovering of the old wisdom for a new age.*

*Re-focus on striving for holiness in everyday life accompanied by practical guidance from the Church. Back to basics, call to conversion, universal call to holiness, sanctity. Teach people how to pray, to develop an actual, real relationship with God and to fall more in love with Christ via prayer. Foster a culture of going to Confession regularly and also encourage priests to give spiritual direction to people.*

There were two main types of spirituality discussed within this theme. One group of participants spoke about a need for a more charismatic spirituality, based on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and called for the Church to renew their support for it:

*The birth of the Church was at Pentecost. The Catholic Church is a Pentecostal church whose members have received 'Special Gifts' (Charisms) of the Holy Spirit. Each believer has a right and duty to use these gifts within the Church and for the common good. The Plenary Council prayer calls for a new Pentecost. The Church must not attempt to extinguish the Charismatic Renewal, but embrace it.*

Participants in this group called for greater openness to the working of the Holy Spirit and the promotion of Charismatic Mass and prayer groups.

A second group advocated for meditation and a contemplative spirituality and wanted it to be promoted and used widely:

*To be a more contemplative people schooled in quiet meditation and contemplation at home, school, seminaries, novitiates as a basis for actions conscious of God's mission in the world—to be the still point in a hyper-active world.*

People within this group were more inclined towards mysticism and advocated for silent and contemplative prayer, *Lectio Divina*, centering prayer and meditation groups. They also voiced a need to treat others, including people of all religions, with openness, tolerance and respect.

Overall, there were numerous recommendations made for greater prayer, especially praying the Rosary, Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction, and more retreats and spiritual seminars. People also supported frequent Mass and Confession, and study of the Scriptures or faith formation through Bible study or prayer groups. There was great fervour to evangelise, share the faith and spread

the Gospel as well as an encouragement of lay associations and new ecclesial ministries.

## Care for Neighbour

Within the responses relating to “Love God, love neighbour”, there was a large group of participants who focused on the theme of caring for our neighbour. “Love thy neighbour as thyself” was a phrase repeatedly mentioned. People spoke of the need for greater “love”, “kindness”, “compassion”, “concern” and “respect” for others. They also expressed a need and responsibility for helping everyone without disregarding the needs of any one group.

*God is asking us to treat each other as we would like to be treated, with kindness and respect. That includes every person we directly or indirectly encounter, refugees, homeless on the street, colleagues, family members, everyone. As members of the Catholic Church, we should take this message everywhere, but much stronger—let our actions show that we mean it, both in the preaching and in the actual involvement in advocating and acting out the ‘treat everyone as you would like to be treated’ motto.*

There was some concern that parish communities tended to reach out to others in society rather than looking after people within their own community. As one participant explained:

*We worship together on Sundays ... but do we pray together for each other ... take the time to socialise with each other ... look after each other ... take care of our priests?*

*... A priest once said to me: A Church is not just a community, it is a family ... Too often our attention to do outreach is so stretched that we lose focus from looking after our own family members ... Where one feels love in the family, one becomes secure and confident. And the message of God's love living in our lives becomes real.*

Nevertheless, there was a strong need to look beyond our communities to reach those in the wider community. For many, care for neighbour meant caring for “all people in our wider world, no matter what their colour, creed or religion”. This also meant caring for the “divorced”, people of “different sexual orientation” and also refugees and asylum seekers, amongst others.

*To love our neighbour including the refugees, Muslims, and other outcasts, gay*

*and bisexual, transgender, HIV positive, the elderly, the disabled, the drug addicts, the abused. To love as Christ loves, to be open, welcoming and supportive.*

*God is asking us to be accepting of refugees and to understand and reach out to our Indigenous people and those that are marginalised. God wants us to stop taking and to start giving. We take from the land, we take from each other and we give so little back.*

“Doing good to others” was a strong feature of the participants’ responses. A number of them spoke about being “non-judgemental” and “tolerant”. There was also a strong need felt to “simply talk to people”, “accompany them”, and help bring them hope.





*God is calling me to be mindful about other people and to be aware that other people might be going through a tough time ... To reach out to the people who are in my reach. To treat them as every human deserves to be treated. If I'm going out of my way, a small smile to the homeless can brighten up their day. People need to feel loved and know there is a purpose in this world for them.*

*There are lots of awful things happening in the world today and I think God is asking us to be people of hope ... a people that embraces our neighbours and shows an example of good living, striving for justice, kindness, etc.*

Being “forgiving”, “generous” and “understanding”, treating people with “mercy”, “fairness” and “equality”, and having “greater sensitivity towards others” were also qualities supported by participants in this response group. Examples of the Good Samaritan and of supporting Pope Francis’s vision of a Church of the poor and disadvantaged were also discussed within this theme.

## Better Faith Formation

An important aspect of loving God was seeking to follow God’s ways more closely. Bearing faithful witness also meant knowing the faith better and seeking to understand the Scriptures more. For these reasons, therefore, a large number of participants believed that faith formation was of critical importance to improve their relationships with God. Several believed that the crisis of faith faced by many Catholics who were not actively involved in Church was also due to a lack of faith formation.

*I believe many Catholics become disengaged because they are not getting fed spiritually, they journey through life without directions from the Scriptures and eventually lose faith in the Church and or in God. The Church needs to hear teachings, principles, values that are based on the Scriptures and lived out in the Christian life. We need to raise leaders, preachers, teachers, communicators that can speak the authentic message of the Bible.*

*... I feel this is a missed opportunity which places all our efforts on initial formation but then leaves the on-going formation to the resolution of the individual rather than as an opportunity to deepen their life in Christ.*

Many participants spoke about the gap in adult faith formation resources and opportunities, and especially on new and emerging topics. There were many requests for regular parish-based adult catechesis:

*The Australian Church has not had a tradition of offering adult faith education including the social sciences at tertiary level to the laity especially outside the capital cities. We need an educated and informed Catholic culture for the laity in Scripture, theology, Church history, philosophy, social justice, etc.*

*For adults, a continued and ongoing Catholic formation and the implications on social and moral aspects, such as IVF, surrogacy, transgender fluidity ideology, etc.*

Several suggestions were also made for more faith-based educational courses, Lenten lecture programs, discussion groups, missions, retreats and spiritual development programs. Adult faith

education was also seen to be useful for parents to educate their children and for older people to educate themselves about the changes in the Church.

There were also recommendations made to strengthen the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) processes in parishes with better content and resources and qualified teachers:

*RCIA programs need to be solid in forming candidates in the Catholic faith instead of superficial and wishy-washy.*

*To better integrate the liturgical, catechetical and pastoral dimensions of the RCIA process. This requires better formation of clergy and RCIA teams around the relationship of the three dimensions so that one dimension is not excluded because we wish to emphasise the others. We seek to ensure our enquirers and catechumens experience the fullness of the RCIA experience.*

The need for faith formation was seen to be important in the present day so that the Church explains its beliefs and practices more clearly in terms the modern world could understand. Many believed that it could no longer be assumed that lay people in Church had proper knowledge and understanding of their faith.

Some participants spoke about a need for children to have better faith formation in parishes and schools. There were some recommendations for revisiting the model of “Sunday school” classes or strengthening “Liturgy of the Word” sessions.

*Our catechetical model too often reflects a vanished reality, where the Church prepared children for the sacraments knowing that their ongoing participation*

*was, in a large part, socially conditioned. We must prepare our children for a counter-cultural life and faith.*

There was also concern that faith formation was not reaching Catholic children who were home-schooled and those attending secular schools, especially when poor catechesis in the past had meant that parents of such children were in no position to teach the faith at home. Some other aspects of this theme are also discussed in Chapter 5 on Mass and Chapter 14 on Catholic education in schools.

Some participants mentioned the work and ministry of several lay ecclesial movements as being significant in helping people understand the faith, grow in their Christian identity and receive ongoing formation. Some examples of these were movements like Opus Dei and the Emmanuel community.

A few participants cautioned against new-age practices that drew people away from their faith, such as certain yoga practices, the Enneagram and other customs associated with witchcraft and the occult. These participants mentioned a need for more exorcists or a special deliverance ministry group consisting of laity and religious to help provide knowledge to lay people about these evil practices and to provide assistance to those who needed special help in this area.

There were also some very specific requests made, for example, from this group of Catholic health care practitioners who asked for more faith formation for students and practitioners in their industry:

*To bring our practice into conformity with God’s divine plan, we believe that God is asking us individually, and as a group, to know and understand more fully those*

*Church teachings, and their underlying principles, which relate to health care, and to integrate them into our practice. In particular, we seek more instruction on frequently encountered bio-ethical issues such as contraception vs fertility awareness based methods (FABM) i.e. modern natural family planning (NFP), abortion, same-sex-attraction, transgenderism, embryonic stem cell research, end-of-life decision-making,*

*etc. ... This may involve applied teaching in philosophy, theology, history, Church law and bioethics. Sadly, teaching for moral formation is often deficient in many secular teaching institutions at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.*

## Conclusion

This chapter analysed the responses related to the phrase “love God, love neighbour”, commonly used by a large number of participants in response to the stimulus question. Building a relationship with God was a strong theme in a number of participants’ responses. Suggestions to do this included more reliance on God, more prayer and a greater awareness of God’s presence and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Participants also advocated for a greater focus on Christ and His teachings and felt the need to follow Christ more closely and make His presence visible in the wider community. A stronger relationship with Christ was possible through knowledge of the Word of God and many were aware of the call to live out Gospel values in daily life.

Several participants urged Catholics to remain faithful to the teachings of the Church and called for consistency and clarity of teaching in the Church. A number of participants were concerned about those who were at risk of abandoning their faith and urged them to stay connected with a parish and work towards building communities and promoting the Church’s good works.

For many participants, loving God and neighbour meant being a witness in society. All Catholics were called to take a stronger position in declaring the faith to the wider community. A large group of participants also called people to greater holiness through prayer and conversion of heart. Charismatic and contemplative spiritualities were extensively promoted.

Care for neighbour was another popular theme where participants spoke of the need for greater compassion, concern and respect for others. For some it meant looking after people within their own community, whereas, for others the strong need was to reach those in the wider society.

Finally, faith formation was seen to be of critical importance, especially addressing deficiencies in adult faith formation resources and opportunities through provision of educational courses, discussion groups, retreats and other programs. There was also a call for better RCIA processes. Appropriate and effective resources for children in parishes and schools needed to be developed. Some participants promoted the work of lay ecclesial groups, such as Opus Dei and the Emmanuel community, in providing adult faith formation and others cautioned against occult practices.



## QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- How can the Church go about reinforcing Church teaching within our own congregations?
- How can we better nourish and support the spiritual life of adult lay people?
- How do we get people to return to prayer, when we live such a fast-paced life?
- How do all the faithful called to prayer and a living relationship with Jesus Christ learn about their faith through the sacraments, catechesis, ongoing education and following the traditions of the Church in a multicultural society which has become very secular?
- Are we willing to return to the simplicity and fidelity required to reawaken a love of God's truth in the world?
- How can we reach out to those who have left the Church? How do we encourage and give witness to the love of Christ in the world, given the pressures of our secularist society?
- How do we foster each vocation so that our priests flourish, our monasteries and convents are blossoming and lay Christians are present and witnessing in every area of society?
- How can we encourage all Catholics to be open to the Spirit working in people in different ways, through different forms of liturgy (traditional and charismatic), different types of worship and different faith responses to the Spirit in individuals and communities?

## RECOMMENDED READING

Based on findings from the Building Stronger Parishes research project, this topic report specifically examines the data related to nurturing the vocational call of Baptism and the encouragement of parishioners in their faith.

Dantis, Trudy and Richard Rymarz. 2015. "Building Stronger Parishes: Project Topic Report 3: Spirituality and Faith Formation". ACBC Pastoral Research Office. Available to purchase at [www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Building-Stronger-Parishes-Report-3-Spirituality-and-Faith-Formation/p/57049351/category=4727032](http://www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Building-Stronger-Parishes-Report-3-Spirituality-and-Faith-Formation/p/57049351/category=4727032)

## Stories of Faith

*I had been in an abusive marriage for 25 years before I fully recognised that it was abusive. Before that, I blamed myself for my troubled marriage, thinking that I had failed to be a good wife. It took three separate incidents, which happened close together to make me see the level of psychological, physical and emotional abuse that dominated my married life, separating me from Church, friends and my extended family. ... God had never let me lose the gift of prayer, especially in the most trying and painful circumstances and it was this which helped me to endure my troubles and kept me strong and committed when I went back to Mass. One day, my husband and I attended the funeral of our Catholic neighbour. I didn't attend Communion, having been away from Mass for so long, but I knelt to pray, feeling the peace of God in the Cathedral deep in my heart. I prayed, 'Lord, I need this peace in Your Church. I need to come back', but I was afraid of both the power of my longing and of the consequences if I followed it. I knew that there would be greater abuse if I returned to the Church and that was the case. Then I heard a voice. It was my own voice, but in my mind. However, I 'heard' it as if it was spoken and I can still 'hear' the inflection and tone of it as I write. What I heard was: 'They threw stones at Jesus!' I was astounded, although it was years before I told a priest about it. I knew at that moment that I would return and remain. I have never forgotten it and I never missed Mass again from that day. ... I finally left my husband after physical abuse. I am still faithful to my vows and hold no grudges. God is good.*

*"I prayed, 'Lord, I need this peace in Your Church. I need to come back'."*

## 5

## THE MASS

Following on from love of God and neighbour were a number of responses which related to the celebration of the Mass. Participants conveyed the need for the Church to address falling Mass attendance and to pay better attention to all aspects of the liturgy. They also identified the need to reach out and include divorced and remarried people at Mass and to review the annulment process. Participants spoke fervently about focusing on the sacred, acknowledging Christ's presence in the Eucharist and increasing opportunities for Eucharistic Adoration. There was a call to make Mass appealing to youth and children, provide better music at Mass and have better homilies. Participants also raised issues regarding the language of the Mass, including new, inclusive translations. Some favoured a return to Latin, traditional Latin Masses and traditional pre-Vatican II ways. Many highlighted the need for better formation for liturgical ministries and sacramental programs, offering Communion for all people and greater access to Reconciliation and cultural Masses. Finally, participants felt Communion services in rural parishes were vital and there was a need for lay-led liturgies and Masses when suitable priests were not available.

### Attention to Falling Mass Attendance

There was a sense of concern from many participants about the decline in the number of people attending Mass. A few participants suggested the need for urgently studying this “alarming drift away” to ascertain the causes behind

it. Other participants provided reasons why they believed this was happening and made suggestions to initiate change:

*We need to propagate the faith. One way of doing this is to encourage Mass attendance. The question arose about why parents and their children are not attending Mass. It was felt that spirituality does not*

*seem to be ‘in’. Music plays a big part in lifting emotions and leading to spirituality. We have all heard the statements that ‘Mass is boring’ ‘It never changes’. ... If only we realised that God was truly present at Mass, we would want to attend Mass every day.*

*[We need] more reverence in the Mass, and promotion of traditional devotions, practices and prayers, which have proven to be great tools in bringing and keeping people in the Church for hundreds of years. In my opinion, recent moves away from this have largely failed—this can be clearly seen when you look at statistics of Mass attendance, and what today’s Catholics actually believe.*

Some participants held the hierarchy responsible for this decline for failing to let women and lay people have a central role in the direction and decision-making of the Church. Others blamed the

increasingly busy lifestyles of younger people. As one participant suggested, “[We need] extra Mass services for people of different work and family commitments. We should think of ways to make churchgoers not lose faith and stay in church”.

### Better Attention to All Aspects of the Liturgy

Several participants indicated that the liturgy needed revision, particularly with regard to the style of celebration and the scope of involvement of the community. Once again, while there were varying ideas about what changes were needed, most suggestions aimed at encouraging greater participation, as indicated in the responses below:

*Make Easter and Christmas Masses as good and inclusive as possible to encourage those people who only come to those Masses to come more often, and*



*advertise follow-up events. Have food/drink after Mass. Have more 'Family' Masses (kids involved in ministries. e.g. music). Really long Masses can be a turn-off, unless they are engaging (e.g. good music, homily, etc.). Try to have music at all Masses. More young altar servers. More formation and teaching needed for the Mass/Eucharist for young people. Make homilies more relatable and understandable. Personal sharing-style stories are good.*

*Our public worship times need to be real celebrations of Jesus in our lives. Mass and sacraments need to be simplified, shorter, easy-to-understand, more involving and meaningful, spoken clearly in our language. Joyful celebrations—inviting people to return to them.*

*More generally our liturgies should be more engaging. The new translation of the Mass is not accessible to modern communities. The liturgy should be more dynamic so that it encourages greater participation.*

*Liturgies need to be more intimate—like God is with us. Liturgies that are flexible have the potential to be far more creative.*

There were also suggestions for revised Eucharistic prayers and newer songs to stimulate participation along with comments on revising practices for taking up the collection:

*I am sure the celebration of the Mass can be enhanced by simplifying the words and the number of changes of posture. Likewise having two collections instead of only one during the Mass is an unnecessary distraction. Our parish had more than 30*

*years of only one collection and prospered over that period.*

A number of other suggestions for better liturgical practices are discussed throughout this chapter in the sections below.

## Inclusion of the Divorced and Remarried

The need for the inclusion of people who were divorced and remarried was one of the central themes discussed within the topic of “The Mass”. Several hundred participants voiced their concerns and dismay on this issue. There was a strong desire expressed for the Church to have a greater understanding of people’s life situations, particularly of those who were divorced:

*Many couples have been divided due to violence, drug abuse, sexual, physical and emotional violence. Living in the 21st century brings with it difficulties where the Church should be able to be seen as a source of refuge and solace. Marriage is a civil institution that has been made into a sacrament by the Church. Like many rules established by the Church, there is a need to revisit them and see them in the light of modern life.*

Several participants were quite angry about the perceived injustice of Church rules:

*When a marriage relationship has irretrievably broken down, when there is no longer any intimate relationship between the couple, how can it be said that the marriage still exists, and that, therefore, another marriage cannot be validly entered into? To say that marriages do not end is*

*to fly in the face of reality. To demand that a person whose previous relationship has broken down can never enter into another relationship without the blessing of the faith community is tying up impossible burdens and placing them on people’s shoulders. ... To demand that people who have committed themselves to a new relationship either exit that relationship, or continue in it but without sexual intimacy, or be excluded from full participation in the Eucharist, is both unrealistic and unjust.*

*Frankly, the argument that marriages have to be shown retrospectively to have been non-marriages is arcane sophistry. We need to recognise that marriages undertaken lovingly and in good faith by both parties can become unworkable and should not condemn parties to a lifetime of pain and solitude.*

While Church teaching does not exclude people who are divorced or separated, and not remarried, from receiving the Eucharist, it was clear from the responses that many participants were unaware this was the case. Participants felt that the exclusion of people from receiving Communion was an unfair practice, particularly for those who did not choose it for themselves.

*The rule that divorced Catholics not be allowed to receive Holy Communion is unfair to Catholic divorcees who did not want divorce and whose behaviour did not provide grounds for divorce.*

*Divorce is never wanted or planned for and in some cases, necessary for the safety and wellbeing of the individuals involved. The Church should not turn their backs on them as this denies their dignity and makes them less equal than their peers.*

There were many requests made for the Church to revise its official teachings and rules regarding

divorce, remarriage and the reception of Holy Communion. Participants asked the Church “to reinforce hope” and be more “forgiving”, “respectful”, “compassionate”, “inclusive” and “open”. There were appeals made to “welcome back people who have been turned away and felt abandoned”.

Some participants wanted the Church hierarchy to be more Christ-like in their response to the divorced and remarried in considering “What would Jesus do?”

*We need to allow divorced and remarried couples to return to full communion with the Church as recipients of Eucharist without necessarily fulfilling requirements for annulment.*

*Jesus did not condemn, but forgave and told the sinner ‘do not sin any more’. Is there anyone who can say that they have not sinned any more? Denying access to the Eucharist may as well be seen as excommunication as the purpose of the Mass has been taken away.*

A few participants also believed that Church officials needed to apologise for the trauma, hurt and pain caused in the past to unwed mothers.

## On the Annulment Process

There was particular emphasis placed on the need to overhaul the process of annulment. Participants voiced their grief over the “trauma of marriage tribunals” and described their experience of the process as being “brutal”, “embarrassing and undignified”, “cumbersome”, “demeaning” and “severe”.

*Why is it that my husband and I have to go through the annulment when those married in another church or by a civil celebrant*

*can quite easily be married in the Catholic Church? The laws around this need to be changed.*

Several participants wanted the annulment process to be clearer, easier, more humane and financially accessible.

*Embrace and welcome divorced Catholics who seek another chance at married life and desire to marry in the Catholic Church. Quicken the annulment process, make it affordable, do not condemn them to live in relationships outside marriage or push them out of the Catholic Church to another Church.*

*The marriage annulment process is cumbersome and not guaranteed if a partner decides to walk out. So if you can’t get an annulment not only are you left not being able to fully participate in Mass, but you live a life alone and unable to celebrate your faith together with a future partner.*

Participants believed that there was an urgent need to allow divorced couples to remarry and be accepted in the Church and for individuals to be encouraged to make decisions according to their own conscience. There was a suggestion of a “new theology of marriage” to help facilitate this. Some also expressed a need to provide specialised help to those in particularly difficult or more vulnerable situations. One such group suggested was that of divorced men who found themselves up against the legal system despite no fault of their own. Other individuals who required a more relaxed process were those abandoned by their partner or those who were from another Christian denomination:

*As a priest, what has disturbed me the most has been situations where one spouse ... has simply abandoned their*

*partner for another partner and pursued the other relationship beyond the possibility of healing of the marriage. Such behaviour in itself reveals the lack of capacity of the unfaithful partner to have entered into the Sacrament of Marriage (or valid marriage of any kind). It would make a huge practical difference if the Church could provide a pastoral response in such cases by which the abandoned partner is given a much easier path to annulment than usual.*

*People from the secular world and Protestant churches are taught that it is okay to divorce a spouse from their first marriage to marry again. Many of these individuals ... have no idea that this is forbidden in the Catholic Church ... [T]here could be more leniency exercised in the application for annulment in the above situation and others like it where there is a genuine desire to enter the true Church established by Jesus Christ.*

While there were many responses in favour of changing the Catholic rules on divorce and annulment, there were also responses from other participants who felt that the rules ought to remain the same. These responses were explored in detail in the theme titled Remaining faithful to Church teaching in Chapter 4.

## Communion for All

Speaking on the topic of the reception of Holy Communion were a number of participants who believed that excluding certain individuals from receiving the Body and Blood of Christ was an unjust practice. People who voiced their protests on this issue wanted the sacrament to be open to

all people, including homosexuals, non-Catholic spouses and people from other Christian or faith traditions.

*It is important that we welcome all to the Eucharistic table, including those from other faith traditions, the divorced and gay/lesbian. As a church we must love—it is not our role to judge.*

There were calls for greater inclusivity and a change of rules in this regard. Many also believed that the reception of Holy Communion needed to be solely the choice of each individual based on their conscience alone:

*Catholics who have been considered marginalized are to be free to choose whether they receive Eucharist and participate in Catholic ceremonies and parish life.*

*To accept all people to Communion—it is stupid to require people to be perfect before they come to Communion which is actually for those who need God’s love.*

There were also several participants with Coeliac disease who felt excluded from Holy Communion because of the non-availability of gluten-free hosts. They asked for these to be made freely available in all parishes.

## Focus on the Sacred

Participants spoke of the need for more reverent and holy celebrations of the sacrifice of the Mass. Many felt that the Church needed to encourage greater silence and prayer, focusing on “the gifts of reverence and awe” and creating an appropriate atmosphere for people to experience the presence of God more strongly.



*We need to bring holiness back into the Church. The Church has become a place of social interaction, rather than a place of mystery and an encounter with God ... [Keep] jokes, inappropriate music, clapping, singing happy birthday to parishioners, etc. outside of the Mass, as it takes away from the focus of the holy sacrifice of Christ taking place.*

Some participants believed that priests needed to practise greater reverence first so that people would follow their example. In addition, there were requests made to encourage parishioners to receive the Holy Eucharist on their tongue rather than their hand, encourage a modest dress code at Mass and discourage unnecessary talking in church before and after Mass.

Some young people also voiced similar desires. One group noted that many young people wanted sacred music, greater reverence, some Latin usage in the Mass and holy, reverent priests. All these helped make their experience of the sacraments quite different from that of a club or pop concert. A few participants also spoke of a need for a higher quality of Church arts such as architecture, music, incense and iconography to increase the sense of

sacredness in places of worship. There was also mention made of the need for churches to refrain from holding sacrilegious events in their precincts.

### Acknowledge Christ's Presence in the Eucharist

Along with the need for greater liturgical sacredness was an expressed desire from participants to build a deeper relationship with Christ. This began with an acknowledgement of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and a great respect for the Blessed Sacrament:

*I believe God is asking us to truly encounter Jesus, present in the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of the Christian life. Every effort should be made to celebrate this sacrament with the utmost of solemnity. All of our best efforts should be given to making the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass truly feel like heaven on earth.*

Many participants reflected that young people being prepared for sacraments in schools and parishes were not taught this reality and therefore the need for catechesis in this regard was more urgent than ever before. As one participant remarked:

*There will be no renewal in the Church until we start to show reverence for our Lord who is truly, really, substantially present in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. How is it that I went through Catholic schooling for 12 years and was never taught this? It was treated as though it was a piece of bread passed around from hand to hand ... If people really knew/were catechised properly about the Church's teaching on the Real Presence, don't you think our lives would be much better?*

Overall, some suggestions to alleviate this situation included teaching people about “the wonder of transubstantiation”, reverting back to the tradition of receiving Holy Communion on the tongue and emphasising the kneeling of the congregation at the opening of the tabernacle. In addition, requests were made for greater formation for Eucharistic ministers on the proper care and treatment of hosts and increased opportunities for Eucharistic Adoration.

### Eucharistic Adoration

For many participants, the promotion of Eucharistic Adoration was the key to bringing about “a renewal in faith” or a “new wave of evangelisation”. Participants spoke of the need for greater opportunities for “Holy Hours” and a higher frequency of Adoration to be available and for its launch in parishes where the practice was absent.

*[God is asking us] to have Eucharistic Adoration every day of the week and devote each day to a specific cause e.g. for vocations, for the Pope and the Church, for families, for the unborn, for the sick, for the holy souls in purgatory.*

Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration was also highly regarded. Participants described the positive effects this had on their parish community while requesting for this to be an established practice in all dioceses and deaneries:

*In my parish, we have the blessing of perpetual Eucharistic Adoration. It has dramatically enriched and deepened our faith, both individually and as a community. Our Blessed Sacrament chapel has brought great renewal to the lives of all, young and old, and we feel more united with each other and Jesus ... My friends in other parishes where there is also perpetual Adoration feel the same way. Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration has helped us to live out our faith with new desire and confidence.*

*I have observed over the years that [in] those parishes that foster Eucharistic Adoration, the apostolic fruits are abundant and especially vocations to the priesthood and religious life.*

*I think every deanery should work together to establish a location and roster for perpetual Adoration in at least one of the parishes.*

### Mass to be Appealing to Youth and Children

The need for the Mass to be appealing to young people and children was a significant theme discussed by many participants. Several of these were parents who struggled with getting their children to Mass. They explained how Sunday Masses appeared to be generally unappealing to teenagers while Masses at Catholic youth camps

that had more young people and were livelier and more meaningful prompted an enthusiastic response.

In this regard, there were several suggestions made, particularly for Mass to have shorter homilies and livelier music without “abandoning its dignity”. There was also a need expressed to encourage liturgical activities for young people.

*To encourage the involvement of the youth in Sunday roles such as reading, bringing of the gifts, music, choir—not just at Youth Masses.*

*Let people as young as seven years help the Church (ring the bells, light the candles, readings and Prayers of the Faithful).*

*We believe that the Church needs to use opportunities such as when the schools celebrate Grandparents’ Day to include children, parents & grandparents to be involved in a liturgy which illustrates the dignity of each person, their need for respect and how well each of us contributes to the building the faith of our community. Use of a Children’s Mass would also be a useful adjunct to such a celebration.*

A few participants spoke of more radical changes such as “images, dance, colour”, “rock music” and “things that a younger audience will listen to”. There were several youth in schools who contributed their responses and made suggestions of “more upbeat music”, “a more enthusiastic vibe” and provision of food.

There were several requests made to have more Youth Masses, Children’s Liturgies and Family Masses, particularly in parishes where there were none. Other suggestions also included getting the school to be involved in Children’s Liturgy and/or Youth Masses:

*Children’s Liturgy needs to be led by youth with an adult in the room, or the school teachers need to get involved—get school and Church involved as when teachers come, children come.*

*Advertise Children’s and/or Youth Mass through [the] parish, the local Catholic primary school, the catechists and the local Catholic high school. The older youth can minister to the younger children. It could be three times a year and culminate with Children’s/Youth Mass at Christmas. We need to find ways to make the Church appealing to younger generations. It needs to be relevant while still keeping traditions alive.*

While these responses were more predominant, there were other participants who felt that Children’s Mass and liturgy and things such as colouring and drawing should be disfavoured and replaced with the children’s participation in the “existing prayers, actions and understanding of the Catholic Mass contained in the Roman Missal”. As one participant explained:

*If children at seven years are being confirmed then the Mass offered for them should include all correct prayers, with appropriate liturgical music, not dumbed-down hymns and Mass settings that don’t teach them the prayers or anything about the mystery of God.*

## Greater Attention to Music

For a number of participants, one of the main ways to enhance the celebration of the Mass was by ensuring that there was more “uplifting”, “engaging” and “inspiring” singing and music.

*Music needs to move with the times to ensure it is engaging—incorporating the old as well.*

There was division, however, on the type of music people preferred. One group of people had a clear preference for more traditional sacred music:

*Recognise that music should be either good, or not used at all during the Mass. This would involve culling many of the songs that have been in use since the 1970s; commissioning new music on a regular basis; and not being afraid to revive classic sacred music (competently performed) for use in the Mass.*

*Liturgical music should emphasise theological truths, engage the intellect, support the solemnity of the liturgy and enrich contemplative prayer ... A deep regard for older forms of liturgical music should also be nourished as it is important for the Church to maintain its roots and it would be a shame to let such traditional and beautiful music be lost and be no longer appreciated.*

*Return to appropriate music selections for all Masses and this should extend to weddings and funerals. This tendency to value popularity over fidelity and expediency over integrity must stop.*

Participants from this group asked for more “classical liturgical music” and “proper hymnody and

chant” at Mass. They also expressed a disapproval of recorded hymns and “off-key” cantors and choirs.

A second group of participants favoured music that was more modern, “joyful”, “energised”, “upbeat” and “soul-filled”:

*More modern worship style and music in Mass (even rap)—more down to earth and relatable.*

*Improve music at Masses—hymns with stirring music. What’s wrong with many of Wesley’s or Whitaker’s hymns? They can be checked for theological relevance. Many see our Catholic services as irrelevant to the present day. [We need] worship that’s vibrant in this day and age, with good music that’s got a beat not slow old-fashioned organ music with ditties.*

Some participants voiced a need for lay people to have a say in what music was used at Mass. There were criticisms of some priests in parishes where lay people were removed from the process of choosing the music. Others complained that their parish priests only approved of certain Catholic hymns and left out others, despite the hymns being more appealing to parishioners.

There were also suggestions made of involving music talent from schools and the wider society and having “skilled top-class people” take charge of mixing the music. Some participants also requested that parishes provide for paid music ministry co-ordinators.

Some other comments related to the music at Mass were “Church songs should not be a performance”, “high-pitched music discourages people from joining in the singing” and “Charismatic retreat songs are really uplifting”.





### Better Homilies

A number of participants discussed the need for better homilies at Mass, which were “uplifting” and “inspiring” and not “dry” and “irrelevant”. Many wanted homilies that explained the readings of the day and what the Scriptures meant for people in their everyday lives and in the reality of the world they lived in.

*The Church needs to hear teachings, principles, values that are based on the Scriptures and live out the Christian life. We need to raise leaders, preachers, teachers, communicators that can speak the authentic message of the Bible, and*

*honour the name of Jesus. I believe good preaching is lacking in the Church today.*

*Homilies from the heart, with conviction—it’s obvious when a priest means what he says. And if he’s looking bored himself, how can we be enthusiastic?*

Some participants favoured shorter homilies with simple language:

*Long homilies that provide a series of do’s and don’ts are antiquated. We need contextualised celebrations that speak to the heart—not lectures. Shorter liturgies are needed. We are all time poor.*

Others reaffirmed the need for priests to be clearly understood in English and be well prepared to teach. This included training in public speaking, using inclusive vocabulary and an engaging mode of delivery:

*Notwithstanding the importance of the Eucharist to the Mass, good preaching is also crucial. While priests may have adequate theological training, the way they preach needs support. Priests should have preaching training and resources available as well as mentoring. It seems to me that logical framing of the content, the manner [in which] it is delivered, use of technology and applicability to parishioners’ lives all needs improving.*

A few participants spoke of the need for homilists to provide faith formation:

*Priests to give strong homilies and not be afraid to address issues like abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage from the doctrinal perspective.*

*To ensure that homilies properly cover important topics such as Heaven, Hell and Purgatory, Confession and Divine Mercy, the Eucharist, the Beatitudes, the fruits of the Holy Spirit, the cardinal virtues, the lives of the saints so that the faithful receive formation each week.*

There were a number of requests for homilies to be



given by a layperson, for example a woman or a teacher, to better relate to the audience present:

*Homilies are given that speak to the heart as well as the mind, ones that relate to real life experience, and the balance between what we owe to 'God and to Caesar'; how to live as a Christian in today's society. The homilist should be the person who can do it best, not automatically the ordained person, who may not have the best skills in this area compared to others in the congregation*

*Homilies need to be more relevant to the people today— [the] priest is not necessarily the best person to give the homily! The Church is all about the people.*

*Allowing our theologically educated laity to preach—our sermons need to give us strength and spiritual sustenance to brave this confusing and violent world.*

## Different Translation of the Mass

Amongst the many suggestions for better liturgy, a number of participants voiced their concerns about the current translation of the Mass and requested that it be changed. Many felt the current version was “irrelevant”, “meaningless”, “archaic” and “culturally inappropriate”. Some participants struggled with certain words, which they felt alienated certain groups of people. Other believed that the words were more difficult for newer migrants whose second or third language was English:

*The Church in Australia needs more dynamic and inclusive liturgy, which reflects Australian culture and language ... It is more important for the language of the liturgy to make sense in Australian English*

*than to reflect a word-for-word translation from the Latin, a language dead for a thousand years.*

*That the liturgy of the Mass should use language which is common to all people, as unknown words (e.g. 'consubstantial') alienate people and fosters an 'us' and 'them' atmosphere.*

*I have been a Mass-going Catholic all my life. We were told that the revision of the English text developed following Vatican II would offer us 'elevated' language. There are some texts I agree with, e.g. "Lord, I am not worthy..." However, I find it discouraging when week after week, I find myself asking "What was that about?" after the prayers of the Mass and some parts of the Eucharistic Prayers are rattled off in clumsy sentences which are obviously longer than a comfortable breath, containing words which are sometimes alienating, obscure or theological abstractions unrelated to my world's culture as I experience it.*

There was a strong demand from one group of participants for the introduction of a new translation of the Missal that had gender-inclusive liturgical language. People within this group believed that women felt excluded from a liturgy that was, as one participant termed it, a “liturgically male version of the Mass”. Another explained:

*"For us men and our salvation" was not part of the creed until the new translation and was a slap in the face to many of us. It may seem a little thing but when the Church treats half the population like they're unworthy it is hard to see how it can remain relevant.*

Another group of participants requested a return to earlier translations. These included the 1998

translation of the Mass based on the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), which a majority favoured, and other older versions:

*Our strong recommendation is that the Australian Church adopt the 1998 translation of the Roman Missal, because the language of the 2011 translation seems pompous and convoluted. Also that we adopt the Revised New Jerusalem Bible for a new Australian lectionary.*

*A return to the first English translation of the missal after Vatican II would be a great start, it was simple and uncomplicated and resonated with the Australian Spirit, and, I believe, was much closer to the style of prayer and teaching that Jesus himself is reported to have used and emphasised.*

## Return to Traditional Latin Mass

In keeping with the preference of some to return to earlier practices, one group of participants voiced their distinct preference for a return to “traditional” roots and especially the Latin Mass. Many people in this group felt the Novus Ordo Masses had lost some of the beauty and tradition of Catholicism and they generally favoured practices such as the reception of Holy Communion on the tongue and traditional hymns and Gregorian chant.

*I am 62 years old and lived enthusiastically through the aftermath of Vatican II ... I have come to realise that real renewal in our Church grows out of the ashes of the old ... We need to revisit the ancient liturgy that transformed every Christian nation on earth, and reconsider the actual words of Sacrosanctum Concilium to reform the*

*reform of the liturgy in order to restore the essential character of the Extraordinary form of the Mass. Relearning the musical and poetic heritage of our Church has enriched my faith and reignited my prayer life. During Mass when the priest prays on our behalf, he should look away from the congregation and face the east, the rising sun. The tabernacle, altar and crucifix are all rich in imagery that reminds us that God is the essence of existence, and that He calls us into an intimate relationship with Himself. I am no theologian but I believe a major heresy in our Church is destroying its very purpose.*

*The new Catholicism has lost its sincerity and spirituality. I think we all crave a spiritual life and if we cannot find it in a prayerful Mass, then we will keep searching for it elsewhere until we satisfy this deep need humans have to experience God. I experienced a Latin Mass recently for the first time and the impact of having the altar boys and priests facing the altar and not the congregation has not left me. The idea that we were all praying to God and not being lectured or addressed was distinct. That for me was a spiritual opportunity, my time to adore God, His Son and the Holy Spirit.*

A few participants within this group also disapproved of practices such as female altar servers and lay Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist.

## Return to Traditional Pre-Vatican II Ways

Along with Latin Mass, some participants also asked for a return of Church practices such as





Rosary and Benediction, Eucharistic Adoration and First Friday and Saturday devotions to combat modernism and other secular practices. A few asked for more traditional practices such as Baptism by full immersion and head coverings for women in Church.

*God is asking us to return to traditional Catholic values and practice. Basically, a return to the ancient faith, as we practiced it for 2000 years. We have abandoned the things that 'made us' Catholic - i.e. our culture and traditions. These things have been trashed and considered 'old fashioned' and 'worthless' - but they are not! They are a part of who we are (or were). Things like the Traditional Latin Mass, praying the Rosary, Corpus Christi*

*processions, traditional prayers and hymns, etc.*

Some younger people also appeared to favour more traditional practices:

*I believe that we have faltered in abandoning or sidelining many beautiful and traditional elements of the faith (e.g. sacred chant, the Traditional rite of the Mass and personal devotions such as fasting, frequent Confession and the centrality of the Eucharist in Catholic spirituality) and by being too submissive to a wider, secular culture on many issues that pertain deeply to Catholic identity and doctrine ... I believe that God's message to us at this time is to remember who we*

*are as Catholics—remember who we once were and what we could become again if we only returned to the ancient roots of our faith. As a young person, I have great hope in this approach as I have met many younger people who have a great love for the traditional Catholic faith. But I am also concerned that our voices will not be heard by the Church and that the current problems will only be magnified in the future if we continue down our current path of modernisation and submission.*

### Better Formation for Liturgical Ministries and Sacramental Programs

For those participants who were keen to improve the Ordinary Form of the Mass, the need to encourage greater lay participation was of prime importance. However, in this regard, a number of participants within this group believed that greater formation was necessary for all lay people assisting in liturgical ministries.

*There needs to be stronger liturgy training for acolytes, readers, special ministers and altar servers.*

A few participants suggested that this training be included for those who were involved in leading sacramental programs and all other catechists as well.

There were suggestions made for the creation of a systematic parish-based program for all liturgical ministries. Another recommendation was for a national distance education program, using online video and chat, which could be accessible to people

all over the country, especially in rural and regional areas where resources were less well developed.

### Lay-led Liturgies

With the encouragement of greater participation of lay people, there was also a need expressed for a greater appreciation of and encouragement for lay-led liturgies or Communion services, particularly in rural and regional areas where Masses were infrequent and priests were scarce. As one participant explained the situation in his parish:

*One argument against encouragement of lay-led liturgies is that many of the laity do not like them. Thus, the number of people attending our fortnightly lay-led liturgies was half that of the people attending Masses in the alternate weekends. Of course, lay-led liturgies require discipline and work but particularly the support of parish priests. I understand that when lay-led liturgies were introduced in our parish some 15 years ago, they were operating in our four churches. When my wife and I came here 10 years ago, our church was the only one that still had lay-led liturgies. One reason that the laity does not like lay-led liturgies may be that the Church has stressed for so long that the Mass is the only real worship.*

Participants from rural and regional parishes were greatly concerned about this issue. One participant commented on the anxiety their ageing parish community faced whenever there was a change of priest as people were afraid that their Communion services would be discouraged or stopped altogether.



Many participants asked the Church to promote more lay-led liturgies where suitable priests were not available and to provide people with greater training to lead these and other liturgical services such as funerals. Other suggestions included organising more Liturgy of the Word with Eucharist services on weekdays, setting up a rotating roster of city priests to offer Masses in country parishes and introducing lay-led liturgies and prayers such the Divine Office in regional and rural parishes where they were absent.

There was also a suggestion made for lay people to celebrate the Eucharist and replace the priest when necessary:

*After much prayer and discussions over many years, I am certain that God is saying to us that we need to have much more involvement of lay people in the running of the Church. ... Have positions to allow lay people to undertake much of the work of priests, i.e. do baptisms, lead Mass when priest not present and undertake other roles.*

## Greater Access to Mass and Reconciliation, Cultural Masses

Overall many individuals felt the need for greater access to Mass and the sacraments. There were

a number of different requests made in this area, depending on the location of the parish and the services provided in each community. Accordingly, a number of people made requests for:

- Weekday Masses and Masses at different times on the weekend (particularly in regional and rural parishes);
- More outdoor Masses;
- Youth Masses;
- Frequent Confession times (half hour before daily Mass and at other times).

*My suggestion would be for parish priests to consider having additional Masses (or move their Masses) either in the early morning or at night. Even better if [the] surrounding cluster of parishes can coordinate different Mass times to ensure a wide variety of daily Mass times in the morning (or evening) are covered.*

There were also requests made for Masses to be adapted to the cultural makeup of the parish community and to be celebrated in languages other than English. People in multicultural parishes also asked for the celebration of an occasional multicultural Mass to facilitate greater social tolerance and understanding of other cultures.

## Conclusion

The need for better liturgy was the central topic of many submissions. Concern for falling Mass attendance persuaded many to believe that much needed to be done to facilitate greater participation from the wider Catholic community. Joyful, prayerful, engaging and meaningful celebrations were some suggestions given by participants to encourage this. The inclusion of the divorced and remarried was a particularly strong theme where numbers of participants expressed their desire for changes to be made to accommodate this. There were calls to revise the annulment process. Suggestions were also made to open up the reception of Communion to all people, including those of all sexual orientations, non-Catholic spouses and visitors from other Christian or faith traditions.

A number of submissions focused on renewing the liturgy through a greater appreciation of the sacredness of the Mass and of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, along with an increase in opportunities for Eucharistic Adoration. For others, suggestions for making Mass more appealing to youth and children included meaningful homilies and livelier music as well as more liturgical activities for young people. Increasing the number of Family and Youth Masses and Children's Liturgies was a popular choice while others suggested promoting a greater understanding of the prayers and actions of the Mass.

There were several recommendations made in regards to better homilies and music, although many participants were divided on these issues. The need for homilies to be shorter, clearer, meaningful and inspiring was the choice for many, while others preferred stronger homilies focused on faith formation. In terms of music, while some participants wanted modern and upbeat music, others favoured a return to more traditional hymns and chants.

Several participants desired changes to be made to the language of the Mass, with some preferring a newer, more inclusive translation and others, a return to older versions. A small section of participants believed that the liturgy could be improved by a return to the traditional Latin Mass and the promotion of traditional pre-Vatican II prayers and practices. Amongst the many suggestions made for the improvement of the Mass were the need for better formation of lay people in liturgical ministries and sacramental programs and the promotion of lay-led liturgies in parishes in the absence of a priest. In addition, the facilitation of greater access to Mass and Reconciliation was seen to be very important, particularly in rural areas. Finally, requests were made for more cultural Masses in multicultural parishes.



## QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- How are we to deal with the lack of clergy available to celebrate communion at some parishes and some schools?
- Could the Church do a Mass where they share stories from different religions and people from different Churches come?
- How can the Church reach out to more people, encourage them to become part of the Church community and welcome all who come to Mass and include them fully?
- Why not introduce one Latin Mass a week for the parish?
- Explore more options for music at Mass—involving youth?
- Are we following the Second Vatican Council?
- Is it possible for Church leaders to promote more Eucharistic Adoration in parishes?
- Can attending Reconciliation be better encouraged?
- Why is it that we now have liturgy which uses language which in no ways reflects common usage?

## RECOMMENDED READING

This report examines Mass attenders' attitudes to the new English translation of the Mass by examining attenders' responses to two questions commissioned by the National Liturgical Council in the 2016 National Church Life Survey.

*Reid, Stephen and Robert Dixon. 2018. "Mass Attenders' Attitudes to the English Translation of the Mass: A Report to the National Liturgical Council on Questions Included in the 2016 National Church Life Survey". ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)*

Based on findings from the Building Stronger Parishes research project, this topic report specifically examines the role of liturgy in those parishes which participated in the project.

*Dantis, Trudy. 2015. "Building Stronger Parishes: Project Topic Report 4: Liturgy". ACBC Pastoral Research Office. Available to purchase at [www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Building-Stronger-Parishes-Report-4-Liturgy/p/57049353/category=4727032](http://www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Building-Stronger-Parishes-Report-4-Liturgy/p/57049353/category=4727032)*

## Stories of Faith

*I love the Church I worship at. ... There are all different types of people in it and our priest (and the one before) has always made everyone welcome. I am divorced and take Communion in the church and am allowed to do other jobs, like reading. I'm the Queen of the Nativity Crib being set up, Minister for serving Communion. I have sponsored people becoming Catholic and feel I have been very involved in the life of my parish. If I ever were to marry it would be lovely to think that I could marry in the Church. There seem to be a lot of people that don't fit the 'traditional' Catholic mould yet here we all are, at Mass and engaging in the life of our parish, divorced, gay etc. We are missing out on good people. I think the Church would prefer gay men rather than women as priests. Our Pope is a breath of fresh air but the windows need to be opened with the rest of the Church and attract more young people to a vibrant Church that is moving with the times, still the champion for underdog, welcoming all. I love the liturgy of the Mass.*

*"There seem to be a lot of people that don't fit the 'traditional' Catholic mould yet here we all are..."*



# SACRAMENTS

In addition to the responses on liturgy and the Mass, there were a number of comments addressing the sacraments, in particular the Sacraments of Holy Orders and Marriage. Participants highlighted a need for a greater emphasis on prayer and sacraments. They also expressed a number of issues relating to Holy Orders, such as the ending of celibacy and marriage restrictions for priests, the ordination of women, a greater focus on deacons and concerns regarding language and cultural barriers for overseas priests. There were also opinions expressed regarding the restoration of the Third Rite of Reconciliation and the provision of better preparation and support for engaged and married couples. Some participants called for the sacraments to be administered by religious brothers and sisters. Other sacramental issues addressed in the responses included reviewing the rules for Reconciliation and changing sacrament requirements for baptised adults and children.

## Greater Emphasis on Prayer and Sacraments

The need for greater prayer and frequent access to the sacraments was a strong focus of many participants' responses. Some of these aspects were highlighted in the previous two chapters. Several people believed that Catholics had turned their backs on these practices and it was now time for a return to what one participant termed "a vivid

sacramental life". There were many responses therefore in which participants spoke of a need for a stronger focus on prayer and frequent attendance at Mass and Reconciliation.

*I believe that we have faltered in abandoning or sidelining many beautiful and traditional elements of the faith (e.g. sacred chant, the traditional rite of the Mass and personal devotions such as fasting,*

*frequent confession and the centrality of the Eucharist in Catholic spirituality).*

*Encourage the faithful to go to the sacraments in earnest, particularly regular Mass, Communion and Reconciliation. Not just on Sundays or once a year.*

Many encouraged families to begin saying regular prayers at home so that young children could learn to pray. There was also encouragement for prayers to be taught in schools and for people to be taught to communicate with God through personal prayer. A number of participants mentioned prayers such as devotions and novenas to Our Lady and the saints, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and the Angelus, amongst others.

*The most important need is prayer life. Build a strong faith through prayer—God is real in our lives. Pray the Rosary as Mother Mary taught us. Start prayer groups in our churches. Practise prayer, not just learn about it. Encourage personal prayer at the*

*end of Mass or before Mass starts. Also prayer at home.*

A large group of participants mentioned the need for praying the Rosary, a prayer that many felt had been abandoned over the years. Devotion to Our Lady was also encouraged strongly by this group.

*Prayer is the oxygen of the soul and without it we cannot be close to God. Bishops, priests and religious nuns should constantly encourage the faithful to pray the Rosary and to frequently spend time in Adoration of the Holy Eucharist.*

*We would like to see more teaching and attention given to Our Lady. Further we would like to see more devotional, practice in parishes towards Our Lady, for example: Praying the Hail Holy Queen on Saturdays, ending Mass with a Hail Mary on weekdays, praying the Rosary once a week and having a votive Mass of Our Lady more regularly.*



## Holy Orders

Perhaps the largest area of discussion within the topic of sacraments was Holy Orders. There was a large group of people with opinions about and recommendations for changes to be made to various aspects of this sacrament. The following sections explore these themes in greater detail.

### Ending Celibacy / Allowing Priests to Marry

One of the most frequent themes raised was priestly celibacy. There was a strong consensus that this should end and priests be given the opportunity to marry if they wished. Many participants who supported this were concerned about the shortage of priests in the country and saw this as a way to solve this problem. They also recognised the fact that there were number of men who had entered the priesthood in the past and had later left to marry.

*The original idea of the priest being set apart for a work through celibacy is of course a great one, and one to which some are called. However, the call to be a priest and the call to celibacy need to be separated so that celibacy and marriage can each be options for someone considering a vocation.*

Others believed that the rule of celibacy was old-fashioned and needed to be changed to suit the modern times. They believed that giving up marriage was a lot to ask of a man or woman in the present time. Some saw celibacy as the cause for the recent clergy sexual abuse while others opined otherwise.

*The celibacy rule was not introduced by Christ but much later in the timeline*

*of the Catholic Church. It is archaic and miserable.*

*God is asking us to go back to the early church when married people were priests, bishops and popes. God's plan for human beings is for them to normally have partners (see Genesis). While celibacy was not the cause of the child abuse in the church, it helped to create an environment where men were alone and did not have women around to balance them or confront them. Celibacy is wonderful when freely chosen, even if for a time.*

Some indicated that the practice of the Church in this area was inconsistent with its doctrine on marriage and it set a dangerous precedent that encouraged power control and alienation of the clergy from the reality of family needs and prevented priests from being in touch with people's real needs.

A number of participants believed that the needs of priests had to be considered and having a spouse would be a great support for them. Some also felt that arguments against relaxing the rule for the sake of the family were baseless since modern families were quick to adapt to the needs of their members, and women and men entered into relationships knowing their partner as well, as their expectations and priorities in the marriage.

*Having a spouse would give priests support and companionship and alleviate loneliness.*

*More assistance for priests. They have far too many responsibilities, with help they can focus more on spiritual matters. Priests should be allowed to marry. They have a tough job and it would be helpful to have a partner to share life with.*

Also, participants saw the benefit of this issue in terms of pastoral ministry where they believed a married priest could relate better to parishioners and provide better counselling and advice in the area of marriage and family than a celibate priest could.

*Priests should be allowed to marry to be in connection with society and not live an isolated life in the presbytery mixing with churchgoers only. People would feel more connected with the Church if they could speak to a priest who has experience with families, etc. Families could connect more with the priest as well.*

*Allow priests to marry and have children; nothing would replenish and invigorate the local parish more than the presence of a priest and his family leading the congregation. Imagine how powerful this role modelling would be at the local parish level. Parishioners would support them financially.*

Some participants also wanted the relaxation of the rule of celibacy to extend to all religious men and women.

*Care for our religious—can the Church consider changing its laws (adapting to current times) for our priests, brothers and sisters and consider the possibility of allowing them to marry?*

While there were many comments to end celibacy, there were also some participants who indicated that they wanted the rules to remain the same. One reason for this was because they believed that changing the rules would not increase the vitality of the Church.

*Many people feel that allowing married or women priests will be a positive step. I*

*have heard good and holy people outline both sides of the argument. I feel it is false however to think this will win any converts or return people to the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. When lapsed Catholic friends mention the need for married priests I ask if they will return to Mass if this happens and I am always met with blank looks.*

Others were concerned about how a priest would cope with balancing the needs of his family and that of the community. Still others felt that viewing the rule of celibacy as being repressive itself was an incorrect notion and that for many priests their celibacy was a sacrifice to God. For most, not changing the rule meant being steadfast to traditional Church teaching on the matter.

*The movement pushing for allowing priests to marry and for women to be ordained as priests is often misguided and based on erroneous assumptions that the Church is repressing those concerned. Rather, this question should be answered in light of the Church's longstanding teachings and traditions.*

*To stay true to the teachings of Christ and His Church. Especially after watching Q & A the other night where a group of people discussed at length what the Catholic Church should be doing according to them (i.e. non-celibate priests, women priests, in other words—get with the 'times'), I think it is more important than ever that we do not bow down to the expectations of those who wish to dismantle the family, water down and distort the truth, or let the devil take hold of society.*



## Welcoming Back Priests who Have Left to Marry

In line with allowing priests to marry, some participants also felt that the Church should welcome back priests who had left to get married. This was mainly for two reasons: one, people felt that the return of these men would help bolster the numbers of priests in Australia, and two, having married men serving in parishes would revitalise pastoral ministry.

*We should do something to obtain more priests—a) restore men who have been forced to leave the priesthood to marry b) they could continue in the profession they are engaged in and say Mass on Sundays or more often if possible.*

Many also commented on the fact that the Church seemed to have double standards in allowing converted Anglican priests to keep their family while not allowing Catholic priests to do the same.

*I have known many good, committed and talented priests who have had to find other ministries outside the Church because they chose to marry, yet our communities have had to accept the ministry of ex-Anglican married priests, and welcome their families into our communities. This is incongruous and grossly unfair to the Catholic priests who are denied the same privileges ... I believe we are being called to accept these necessary changes and developments to the priestly role, for the sake of the Church and for the enrichment of the priesthood itself, a priesthood drawn from the community for the community.*

Overall, there was great support for such men from people within this group especially from those who

personally knew “ex-priests” and others who had experienced the ministry of a former Anglican priest in their Catholic parish.

## Ordaining Married Men to be Priests

Ordaining married men to be priests, or “*Viri Probat*” as many termed it, was another popular recommendation. Many participants believed that this was not against Church teaching and given the ongoing decline in vocations and the struggle to celebrate regular Mass in rural areas, it needed to be implemented with some urgency.

*Accept and encourage the vocations to the ministerial priesthood and to marriage called by God rather than demanding that only celibates be ordained: a call to marriage and ministerial priesthood are not incompatible and are both vocations.*

*Many men have left the priesthood or the seminary but still have yearning to serve the people of God. They should be welcomed into the ranks of priesthood and given the opportunity to exercise their ministry. These priests could be ordained for the local community and would allow Eucharist to be available in small rural areas where churches are closing and parishioners are left without Eucharist in their local area. Ordination would be for a set term and such priests could carry on their ordinary employment while serving the community when required.*

Some married men who felt called to the priesthood also responded in support of this cause. As one participant explained:

*I know that I am called to be a married man: I have a wife, six children and 18 grandchildren. I am a very active member of two parishes ... I also know that I am called to be a priest. I have spent time in the—seminary system but I also discerned that I should get married. I know that our Pope has asked for his bishops to put together a case to ordain mature Catholic men to the priesthood. This needs to be done by the Australian Catholic Bishops [Conference] as a matter of top priority and a matter of urgency.*

Overall, the reasons for supporting this change were many, including bringing the Church up-to-date with Australian society, going back to early Church traditions, having appropriate priests for effective pastoral care of the people, bringing Church traditions in line with accepting married Anglican priests with families and ending a vocation model of priesthood that came almost solely from young, immature men.

As with other areas, there was also concern from some participants who were not keen on this issue. They saw it as being problematic at least in some aspects, such as the number of ex-priests who would actually choose to return, what promises to the bishop would be expected of such men, how would the diocese cope with those who were divorced and what would the expectations or needs be of the wives and children of these men.

## Ordination of Women

There was considerable support from a large group of participants for the ordination of women. A majority of people within this group supported the idea of both married men and women as priests.



The main reason given by most participants for ordaining women was to advocate for inclusivity and gender equality and the need for men and women to be treated equally and to participate as equals in the Church. The justification for this came from the quote from St Paul's Letter to the Galatians (3:26-29), "There can be neither male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus", which was mentioned frequently. Many participants saw women to be just as educated, talented and capable as men in the role.

*To reconsider the role of women priests. God created male and female equally. It is a social construct that females should not be allowed to be Christ's representative on Earth.*

*Female ordination, female leadership roles at all levels of Church.*

*Women have been deliberately restricted. It is critical to open up opportunities for women priests, deacons and acolytes, not simply use them as support staff—as readers, catechists, flower arrangers, vestment launderers and church cleaners, while telling them patronisingly how valuable they are. This will no longer work. The only Australian saint is a woman who had to fight the hierarchy to provide for children and the poor. Consequently, she was excommunicated for 'disobedience' to threatened power-bearers.*

Some participants felt the exclusion of women from being priests was outright discrimination. For others, it was seen as male domination and clerical arrogance. There were many who believed that women were purposely locked out of power structures and decision-making processes, and saw women's ordination as a way to rectify the situation.

*Women are not better than men. They are different: their talents, skills and approaches complement those of men. Denial of positions of authority and responsibility to women thus reduces the capacity of the Church to serve the people adequately. The practice of not allowing women to preside at Eucharist or to lead the community does not come from Jesus, but from an over-emphasis on tradition, which ignores the role of culture in the maintenance of that tradition.*

*A banning of the conversation around the ordination of women is insulting to all of us. It is also abusive. It is patronising clericalism and an abuse of power. The inclusion of women among the ordained needs to be in the conversation of possibilities in the Catholic Church, and not just the conversation, but the vision. The vast majority of people are not just asking for this, they are demanding it ... Failure to engage in this conversation will be a failure of trust that the Holy Spirit of Truth will lead us. ... Failure to seriously consider the ordination of women will render the hierarchy irrelevant in an increasing number of people's eyes. ... Let us listen. Then let our Australian Church present the case forcefully and persistently to the Vatican, refusing to be silenced.*

Other reasons for ordaining women were to supplement clergy numbers, update old dogmas and to bring the Australian Church in line with the changing role of women in society. One participant commented that women were "powerful forces to assist the young to embrace the faith". Several believed that having women priests would have helped prevent some of the problems of abuse and cover-up over the past years.

### **Women should not be priests**

While there were many who supported the ordination of women as priests, a large group was also against the change. Participants in this group believed that this idea was contrary to the authentic teaching of the Church.

*The idea of women priests also does not reflect on the true teachings of the Catholic Church. Christ did not choose women as his first apostles and this was not due to him being unaware of this concept, for the idea of priestesses was rather common in those days. A priest is a representative of God the Father, therefore it is impossible for a woman to be a priest, for how could it be that a woman represents a father if she is a female?*

A number of participants within this group asked for greater clarity in the teaching of the role and vocation of men and women and of the sacrament of priesthood.

*Instead of focusing on 'innovating' our sacraments and Church, there needs to be a renewed understanding of the Catholic faith, history, tradition and identity. The Church has such rich history and theology that needs to be properly examined and communicated before we can discuss 'innovation' ... Improve our understanding of the hierarchy of the Church, the proper role of the priesthood, role of men and women in the Church, and the overall body of Christ.*

Several people in this group supported the expansion of the role of women to other areas of leadership and governance in the Church and many advocated for greater faith formation and need to remain faithful to Church traditions in this regard.

### **Concerns Regarding Overseas Priests**

There were some concerns surrounding the presence of priests from other countries in Australia. A few people believed that such priests misused their positions of decision-making without being truly accountable to their parish.

*In many instances, these overseas priests are destroying the work done by Australian-born priests to promote lay leadership by bringing their clericalism and their cultural mores. Too many of these immigrant priests treat women as second-class citizens and see themselves as set apart. This is not to deny the goodness and noble intentions of these men.*

There was a great deal of frustration and some amount of distrust expressed. Some felt affronted that priests from other countries were being preferred to talented, lay parishioners who could have been given the chance to manage the parish instead. Others believed that if women's ordination was allowed, there would be no need to get priests from overseas.

*To stop importing priests from overseas countries, because of language and cultural problems and to encourage those who are here to return to their home countries. What an insult to lay people to not involve them in running their own liturgies and govern themselves, but to import Nigerians and Indians—people with very different cultures to ours.*

A majority of concerns were largely due to differences in culture and language barriers. While many participants appeared to be quite annoyed and upset over the issue, others





provided recommendations for better training and assimilation.

*Overseas priests bring in their 1950s spirituality like the Rosary before Masses, which is not acceptable in today's world.*

*There was also a desire for those priests from other language backgrounds to receive assistance in being understood by their parishioners, possible with delegating their homilies to others who have a better grasp of the English language, either lay speakers, ministers from other denominations or deacons in order to have great leadership.*

*[We need] to form overseas priests to understand our Indigenous people and their history and needs, as well as to understand the general Australian culture.*

There was a particular need to give both the priest and the recipient community time to learn about and adjust to one another. Training in language skills and professional supervision was advised as

was training in educational methods and dealing with students and staff in Catholic schools. Support from other local or overseas-born priests was also seen to be beneficial. There were positive stories from participants where this assimilation had taken place:

*If we are to recruit priests from overseas, we need to give them an opportunity to inculcate and study in Australia first, ideally as a seminarian. Where this has happened, we have seen great fruits in our diocese and have been blessed with great pastors for our parishes, who are in love with Jesus and connect well with people. When priests have been appointed to parishes straight from overseas, however, there have often been many difficulties. In these parishes, I have seen less numbers at Mass and a poor morale among active parishioners.*

Finally, many participants also believed that receiving priests from overseas was only a “band-aid solution” to the shortage of priests in Australia

and that bishops needed to find other ways to encourage vocations in the country. Possible solutions offered were optional celibacy, ordaining married men, ordaining women and re-admitting suitable priests who had married.

### Greater Focus on Permanent Deacons

Some participants discussed the situation of permanent deacons and asked for greater promotion of and support for their ministry. A number of suggestions were made such as having a deacon in all parishes to assist the priest, especially in the pastoral care of families.

*Married deacons to be given wider involvement in sacramental and pastoral ministry, and used more in delivering sermons.*

*Call more permanent deacons who are prepared to go to the peripheries beyond church and be with people in whatever circumstances they may be in. Go out into the world with big loving and missionary hearts, demonstrating to all what it really means to live a diaconal life.*

There were some who felt that married deacons were particularly experienced and skilled in forming and encouraging lay people for mission and in being “messengers of the new evangelisation”. There was a great need therefore to promote this ministry.

*See the statistics regarding the increase of the permanent diaconate, and know that this is important in the life of the Church. See that the deacon reminds all the baptised and clergy that we are called to service and mission. To understand*

*the importance of the diaconate. Increase awareness among all the baptised that they are exercising the universal call to ‘diakonia’ in a vast number of ways.*

A few participants sought to also expand the role of the diaconate and asked for the Church to consider ordaining married deacons if they felt called to the vocation of priesthood. Another large group asked for the role of the permanent diaconate to be extended to women. This theme is discussed more fully in the next chapter on leadership.

### Better Preparation and Support for Married Couples

The sacrament of marriage and many aspects related to it was widely discussed in the responses. Some themes related to marriage are discussed in other chapters. For example, the inclusion of the divorced and remarried is discussed in Chapter 5 and that of same-sex marriage is discussed in Chapter 16.

In relation to the sacrament, there was a strong need expressed for better catechesis on the Sacrament of Marriage. Many commented that Catholics were often confused because they lacked proper knowledge of the Catechism and what the Church taught about marriage, and relied on friends or the media instead. There was a strong need therefore for better preparation of couples for marriage and for follow-up sessions after a few years. There was also a call for greater consistency in marriage-preparation content across the country.

As part of this, participants also discussed the need for a promotion of natural family planning and for courses to be freely available. Another recommendation was for the teaching on the



Theology of the Body, which promotes chastity and moral behaviour, and for this to be mandated in Catholic secondary schools, universities, youth groups and pre-marriage encounters.

Ongoing sessions related to marriage and family, and readily available support through marriage counselling services were advocated by many:

*There is very little available help to married couples starting or raising a family. Following the sacrament of matrimony, the newlywed couple is out alone in the secular world. Just as persons in the workforce have the availability to further educate themselves in their respective fields of work, there is a great need for instruction in married life for young as well as mature couples, through seminars and workshops ... sharing with all ages the struggles of a being a Catholic faithful. The instruction needed can be composed of both didactic lectures and seminars, as well as interactive problem solving and sharing of older couples with younger ones, ideas that have worked for them.*

Pope Francis's document *Amoris Laetitia*, which deals with many aspects of marriage and family, was quoted often. Since many parishes did not have the resources to provide services, it was recommended that dioceses help them to prepare and deliver professional sessions. Another option was seeking the help of marriage and family ministry groups such as Family Enrichment Australia, Marriage Encounter and Couples for Christ. Some examples of pre- and post-marriage support for families included the formation of family groups or other support networks, mentoring couples, seminars and parenting courses.

*Prioritising broad availability of strongly structured, consistently applied marriage and parenting preparation courses following Church teaching, by well-trained and competent presenters, with ongoing support, education and assistance throughout family life.*

*Support groups for those who are experiencing same-sex-attraction as well as their families—helping them to seek God's call to true masculinity and femininity, that everyone is called to live chastely in accordance with God's will.*

There were also concerns about the lack of opportunities for young Catholics to meet appropriate partners for marriage, with very few parishes willing to engage this ministry. Young people often resorted to dating websites, which came with their own share of dangers:

*I am reminded of how difficult it is for Catholic unmarried people to meet each other with the general intention of marriage.*

*Dating websites are now a very significant means of introduction ... however these carry significant risk to the Catholic faith, especially to any young persons involved. The Church must do something to protect the young. This means establishing a Catholic-sponsored dating or introduction program.*

There was a recommendation therefore for the Church hierarchy to do everything possible to encourage all-Catholic marriages and see this issue as a pastoral priority.

Particular emphasis was also given by some on the need to care for people in mixed marriages.

Caring for partners of mixed marriages was seen as important as was being inclusive to people of other faiths. One participant also highlighted the need for an easier process for Catholic partners wanting to marry outside Australia.

## Restoring the Third Rite of Reconciliation

The sacrament of Reconciliation generated a lot of discussion among a large group of participants, who were predominantly concerned with restoring the Third Rite of Reconciliation.

Many believed that the Third Rite, which was regularly celebrated in Australia in the past, had been extremely popular and meaningful to many people. Several indicated that they had stopped going to Confession since the practice of the Third Rite was discontinued.

*In this age of the Church with a dearth of priests, why not bring back the Third Rite of Reconciliation? I remember some years ago our lovely late parish priest practised this rite and the church was full. Someone 'dobbed' him in and he had to cease the practice. The result was that only a handful of people now go to either the First and/or Second Rite.*

*The Third Rite of Reconciliation should be brought back as this was experienced as a very positive step towards enriching individual Catholics as well as building community.*

*When the Third Rite occurred in ... Catholic parishes especially in the late 1970s and 1980s the church was always packed*

*and parishioners went away very happy. It was fully enriching for the people and it allowed full participation in the liturgy as is the intended ideal. It was an incredible community-builder, there was not only a sense of peace but there was great interconnection with each other.*

Many people believed that re-introducing the Third Rite would bring people back to attending Mass and accessing the sacraments more regularly. They also saw it as beneficial to those on the margins, especially people who had left the Church or married outside it, as well as those who did not feel comfortable going to the First Rite because of bad past experiences.

*To reintroduce and promote the Third Rite of Reconciliation so as to encourage more parishioners to participate in the Sacrament, as neither the First or Second Rites are attracting many parishioners.*

*The Third Rite of Reconciliation was a way of administering the Sacrament of Penance in Australia which spoke to the hearts of the Catholic people and each time this celebration of the sacrament was offered large crowds gathered with family groups attending together. Australians no longer seek advice or counsel from a priest in confession. There are many qualified professionals who offer this service.*

*The People of God have not accepted the teaching that the communal rite of penance is "illegitimate". The Third Rite of Penance and general absolution should return. The re-establishment of the more ancient communal rite of penance will hopefully mean that people would again celebrate*

*the Sacrament of God's love, mercy and forgiveness. The spiritual benefit to people would be a greater number availing themselves of the Sacrament.*

For some, the Third Rite was also a way of safeguarding the Seal of the Confessional, which was in danger of remaining inviolable post the Royal Commission recommendations. For others, this was a way of safeguarding priests as well.

*The Third Rite of Reconciliation should be the most common form practised. This would protect our priests from malicious individuals and give the media less sacrilegious fodder.*

A large number of participants asked that the Third Rite be reinstated at Christmas and Easter Masses and especially for communities that did not have Mass every Sunday. Some also agreed that a distinction could be made such that all serious or mortal sins needed to be confessed through the First Rite.

Some other recommendations made within the topic of sacraments were as follows:

1. That certain sacraments, for example, the Sacrament of Anointing, be administered by nuns and other religious when a priest is not able to attend in a timely manner.
2. That the rules for Reconciliation be changed so that the Sacrament is needed for mortal sins only.
3. That sacraments for children be administered only after age 10.
4. That the rules for the RCIA be amended so that no sacramental preparation or only basic instructions are needed for adult baptism where a person has been attending Mass regularly.

## Conclusion

This chapter discussed the themes relating to sacraments. There was a strong need expressed for a greater focus on prayer and sacraments. Family prayer, devotions and novenas and, in particular, praying the Rosary was advocated by many, as was frequent access to Mass, Communion and Reconciliation.

Within the topic of Holy Orders, the dominant conversation was around the ending of compulsory celibacy for priests and giving them the option to marry if they chose. Participants believed this rule was old-fashioned and restricted the number of possible vocations to the priesthood. Having a spouse could mean greater support and companionship for priests. There were others, however, who did not support this change.

There was support for the Church to welcome back priests who had left to get married to help boost priest numbers and enrich pastoral ministry. Ordaining married men to be priests was also a theme favoured by many.

The responses of participants showed significant support for the ordination of women. Many viewed the change of Church laws in this area as an urgent priority to update Church teaching, be gender inclusive and bring a balance of the feminine voice in areas of pastoral ministry, governance and decision-making. However, another group of participants viewed this as contrary to authentic Church teaching and did not want any change in this area.

There were some concerns voiced regarding the presence of priests from overseas and the challenges they brought in regards to differences in culture and language. Some participants believed that the placement of qualified lay people would be a better choice in their stead. There were also suggestions made to expand the role of deacons and promote the vocation of the permanent diaconate more.

Within the sacrament of marriage, there was a strong voice in favour of better preparation of couples for marriage and for the development and implementation of marriage enrichment courses, including teachings on natural family planning and access to counselling services, amongst others. Greater care of those in mixed marriages was also recommended.

Participants called for a restoration of the Third Rite of Reconciliation to increase the number of people attending Mass and accessing the sacrament and to provide safeguards to the seal of Confession. Other suggestions included allowing some sacraments to be administered by religious brothers and sisters, reviewing the rules for Reconciliation and changing some sacramental requirements for adults and children.



## QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- How will sacraments be administered with declining numbers of clergy?
- Can lay-led liturgy be made to resemble the Mass more closely in regards to the prayers that are not part of lay-led liturgy but are part of the Mass?
- Can liturgy be more a means of expression of what is happening in a community—joy, grief, forgiveness etc.—rather than a rigid adherence to ‘ritual’ which is not always relevant to a situation or life-giving?
- How can we better integrate our many foreign-born priests into the Australian Church?
- Will you review the annulment process so it is more understanding of real-life circumstances and not punish someone whose marriage has ended—particularly if it has ended due to abuse and deception?
- Can the Mass be made more interesting or accommodating for the congregation ... maybe less standing, kneeling etc., making it seem less ritualistic?
- Why does the Catholic Church see the issue of married priests as a problem?
- In light of the success of World Youth Day, why are we not aiming a similar tactic at the middle-years, say 35-50?

## RECOMMENDED READING

This book explores various parish models in order to rethink the ways Catholic parishes can embrace their mission of evangelisation..

*Mallon, James. 2014. “Divine Renovation: Bringing Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission”. Twenty-Third Publication.*

This book, published in 1999, is the result of the findings of a research project which investigated the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia, and is one of the most comprehensive reports of research projects ever undertaken. Summary findings on the role of women in the Church can be found in chapter 9.5.

*Macdonald, Marie, Peter Carpenter, Sandi Cornish, Michael Costigan, Robert Dixon, Margaret Malone, Kevin Manning and Sonia Wagner. 1999. “Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus”. Harper Collins Religious. A full version of the publication can be downloaded from: <https://www.opw.catholic.org.au/treasures/woman-and-man>*

## Stories of Faith

*I am a cradle Catholic but when I was about 13-14 I had many doubts about the faith. ... I didn't share my doubts with anyone. When I was almost 15 I no longer believed in the Eucharist. I thought that it should really only be symbolic. I was blessed to have had a powerful experience during the Easter Vigil that year that convinced me that the Eucharist was in fact real, and that every crumb from the host was indeed precious. Since that time I became more involved in my faith. I attended WYD [World Youth Day] Sydney which was fantastic, I was involved in my church youth group. I was lucky to have had good pastors at my local parish.*

*Another turning point for me was attending ACYF [Australian Catholic Youth Festival] Melbourne and then a deanery youth camp. These allowed me to witness the power of the Holy Spirit in shaping the lives of youth first hand. Many significant things happened which allowed some of the youth to finally feel the love of God and the fellowship of other Catholics—this put some of them on the right path. These experiences also allowed me to discover my calling to teaching. I also made some great friendships. I am now married and my husband is a ‘Traditional Catholic’. We often attend the Tridentine (Latin) Mass together—this has given me a new perspective on liturgy and tradition. ... It would be great if Catholics incorporated some more ‘traditional’ practices into their lives e.g. the Rosary, Eucharistic Adoration, Benediction, novenas etc. These have greatly aided my faith and I didn't know very much about them before meeting my husband. I had had good experiences of the Church, but I know many of my family and friends haven't. I think it's important that we share our stories and listen to the stories of others.*

*“...it's important that we share our stories and listen to the stories of others.”*

# 7 LEADERSHIP AND CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Following on from examining issues surrounding sacraments, there were several opinions expressed addressing leadership and governance in the Church. Many participants highlighted a strong need to end clericalism, promote servant leadership and encourage a greater involvement of the laity. Responses addressed the urgent need for more leadership roles for women within the Church and a greater role for youth. There was a call for improved leadership from bishops and priests, and better selection and formation of candidates for the priesthood. Participants identified a desire to see a new leadership and governance model, along with some advocating for new models of Church, parish or diocese. Finally, there were calls for a greater focus on becoming a Vatican II Church and for leaders to unite and work together.

## Ending Clericalism

The theme most widely discussed by participants within the topic of Leadership and Church Governance was that of clericalism and the need to end it. The word ‘clericalism’, although used often, meant different things to different people. For many, clericalism was “the boys’ club mentality” or “cronyism” or, as one participant put it, “a deviant culture of social elitism, entitlement and privilege which developed out of a particular theological understanding that, at ordination, a man’s very being

is elevated to a level of existence superior to that of other human beings”. Some also associated it with the ornate vestments—“the outward trappings, the outrageous garb”—worn by bishops and cardinals.

Clericalism was seen by many as preventing others from “being the Church”. A number of people spoke of it as “authoritarianism”, “careerism” or “misogyny” and believed that it gave priests an exalted and exclusive status that was detrimental to both the priest and the community.

*We defined clericalism as an attitude among laity and ordained that the ordained is somehow superior, ‘above’, worthy of more respect, has an entitlement to more authority, a power of veto over lay decisions as desired, less accountability and less transparency in decision-making than the non-ordained are entitled to by virtue of their Baptism. This attitude can be overt or more subtle.*

*Top-down, clericalist governance does not serve the silent majority, nor the marginalised, nor those in minority groups. Clericalism is self-serving; it is not ‘doing the right thing’.*

A few participants took offence to the fact that at ordination, a priest was “ontologically changed”, which appeared to make him better than others or closer to God. There was a strong view that such tendencies gave priests a sense of power and entitlement with a lack of accountability, and this

needed to cease. Instead genuine participative, collaborative leadership, which embraced the gifts of all needed to be promoted and flourish.

*What is God asking of us: That the ordained (priest, bishop) work alongside and with others, be seen as an equal and have an equal place at the table when it comes to decisions. That the gifts, talents and leadership skills of all the People of God be recognised, utilised and respected, whether ordained or not.*

*The whole notion of someone being ontologically different by virtue of ordination must be abolished. The emphasis needs to be brought back to the equality and call to holiness of all the baptised.*

There was a great demand for making a person’s competence the main criterion for ministry rather than sex, marital and religious status. Several people asked for the Church to “de-clericalise”



ordained ministry by dissociating the ordained minister (whether bishop, priest or deacon) from institutional power or the ecclesiastical office.

Others asked for more independent and transparent processes, a greater role for the laity in decision-making and more lay representation in key roles. Still others believed that wide-ranging structural changes had to be made to the parish, diocese and the universal Church to reflect this reality.

*Eradicate all aspects of the culture of clericalism and give the laity their rights to share in the guidance and leadership of the church, rights conferred on them by Baptism. As a sign that the hierarchy is really serious about this, Archbishops should renounce the title “Your Grace”, Bishops the title “My Lord” and senior clerics the title “Monsignor”.*

*Clericalism in all its forms should be rejected. Any restoration of public trust in the churches will be dependent on a commitment to contemporary ethical standards of good governance based on the principles of transparency, accountability and inclusivity. There can be no theological excuse for poor governance structures and practices.*

## Servant Leadership

A strong recommendation made by a number of participants to counteract clericalism was for the Church to embrace a servant model of leadership that built up the community. They believed that this would facilitate greater transparency and be an honest and authentic model of leadership and governance that engaged in collaborative listening with all the faithful.

*Educate in leadership as service rather than authority. Education in servant leadership in seminaries and ongoing formation of priests [should allow them to] appreciate that Ordination brings with it responsibility, not privilege.*

Many participants spoke of modelling Jesus at the Last Supper, washing the feet of the disciples. Following Jesus’s example, however, meant different things to participants. For some, it meant embracing the equality of all lay people—men and women alike. For others, it meant being prayerful and cheerful, and working without complaint. Still others saw it as a way to “rebuild trust through action”—an idea made popular through Fr James Mallon’s book *Divine Renovation*.

*Less a leadership of control and clericalism but more a diakonia of a humble servant exemplified by Christ at the Last Supper.*

*That we become an open Church, a learning Church, a vulnerable Church; a Church where the laity embrace their full baptismal identity, and are empowered and encouraged to do so. That our model of leadership be truly that of servant leadership to the People of God.*

Servant leadership meant humble service, authentic love of neighbour and visible leadership for social justice for many. There was a strong need felt to eradicate all attitudes of superiority, authoritarianism and entitlement. For some, this also meant humility lived out in practical ways such as denouncing certain titles (for example, “My Lord”), simplicity in liturgical dress and more frugal property and furnishings.

*Servant leaders do not seek to exercise power or authority but to use their position of leadership for the benefit of fellow*

*children of God with whom they share God’s love. To embrace the weak and helpless, we have to become weak and helpless ourselves. We simply cannot serve from a position of power.*

*A Church which ‘acts justly, loves tenderly and walks humbly with God’. A community of faith, embedded in the Gospel, more communal and less hierarchical providing servant leadership which is respectful, encouraging and welcoming, meeting the needs of today realistically, being open to change, standing with and for the poor with courage and compassion.*

A few participants also wanted a total overhaul of Church structures, a theme discussed more fully in later sections of this chapter.

## Greater Role for Women

The theme of a greater involvement of women in the Church had very strong support from a large group of participants. Chapter 6 on sacraments discussed the ordination of women, which was another popular theme. This section looks at all other forms of involvement discussed in participants’ responses.

The need for greater involvement of women stemmed from various concerns. Firstly, as mentioned in the previous chapter, many were of the strong opinion that women are purposefully excluded from many areas of Church life, particularly areas of governance and decision-making. This was despite the fact that the presence of women in the Church is stronger than that of men and that women do a large share of the work in parishes and communities. There was a need, therefore, for this to change and for women to be treated as equals:

*Equal representation for women in the Church. ... Many of the leaders and early supporters of Christ were women. The women were the first to see and recognise Christ after the Resurrection. Half of God’s humanity are women. Priests and bishops need to recognise that their expertise lies in pastoral ... and spiritual matters.*

*Women ... are in a very real sense the glue that holds the faith of the community together. But the voices of women are silenced when it comes to meaningful participation within the decision-making processes.*

There was also a strong sense that the Church was still old-fashioned in its view of women. Many participants spoke of a need for “genuine acceptance” and “greater affirmation of the contribution of women” in the Church, while recognising that the position and role of women in society had evolved a great deal in the past few centuries.

While a large number advocated for female priests, others felt there was more that could be done even without that option:

*The very early church had a strong role for women and this must be instilled in the Church again. I don’t necessarily think female priests are the answer but the Church must lead by example in embracing women as full equals.*

*If women are not going to be ordained then other ways of meaningful inclusion in decision-making have to be developed.*

Numerous participants made suggestions for women to participate more fully in church leadership positions that included senior administration and



decision-making. Recognising their theological qualifications and getting them involved in dicasteries and other departments of the Curia was also supported. Several also noted that such involvement could also stop shameful events like the clergy sex abuse scandal from ever happening again.

### Women deacons

One strong recommendation made that would give women a greater role in the Church was by allowing them to be ordained as deacons.

*There needs to be a much greater leadership role for women in the Church, women who by their very nature are life-giving, nurturing and compassionate. Let's start with ordaining female deacons (deaconesses) whose primary role is one of service. This provides them with opportunities for contact with people at a grass roots level, resulting in a better understanding of people's pastoral needs. These women should also have a voice at a decision-making level of the Church, bringing to such meetings first-hand knowledge of people's spiritual, emotional, psychological, social and physical needs.*

A number of people saw this as a way of addressing the current lack of priests in dioceses and the lack of ongoing vocations to the priesthood. Also, it made sense to implement this since women already fulfilled a number of roles in parishes, including providing Eucharistic services in the absence of the parish priest. For many, this was also a step towards the future prospect of the ordination of women:

*Women should be encouraged to become*

*deacons, in line with the early history of the church, so that eventually the way might be opened for us to be ordained.*

Appointing women as acolytes in parishes and dioceses where this was not the norm was also encouraged. Other recommendations included inclusive language in the lectionary and allowing women to officiate at weddings, funerals and other sacraments. There was also a call for women to have a decisive voice and voting rights in the Plenary Council, a theme that will be discussed more in Chapter 17.

### Greater Involvement of the Laity

Another popular theme that was widely discussed was the need for greater involvement of the laity. This was seen as another way to counteract clericalism, which many believed was rife within the Church.

Many participants asked for lay people to be involved to a greater extent in the sacramental, teaching and preaching roles of the Church and for them to be encouraged to provide their skills and life experience in meaningful ways:

*While lay involvement is getting better, and the Church does listen, I would love to see a church that involves the laity more, gives more of a scope for the laity to participate in the management of the Church.*

*I think God is asking us to take more responsibility for our worship: lay people giving homilies, ... more leadership in prayer during the Mass, ... 'Sunday School' for children, ways to organise people in different activities that culminate in the Mass on Sundays on a regular basis.*

*Qualified lay people are able to carry out many of the ministries that our very busy priests are expected to do in the parish—[it is] time for these people to be acknowledged and invited to work alongside our priests.*

The role of the laity as a support for priests in pastoral ministry was also strongly encouraged. For example, as in this case, in the area of evangelisation:

*The laity must be valued and trusted to carry on the work of the Church at a time when priests are lessening. The priests must "let go" of their power over the laity and realise that the laity are powerful instruments in passing on the faith. For this to happen there needs to be education of the laity by those who also have been educated in modern methods and Scripture to be equipped to teach others.*

There was also strong support for an increased role of the laity in senior leadership positions in parishes and dioceses and several requests were made for lay people to run or administer parishes. Some also spoke of the possibility of lay people giving homilies at Mass and even celebrating the Eucharist:

*Involve lay people more in high-level decision-making bodies, e.g. episcopal councils, councils of priests, colleges of consultors, ACBC plenary meetings. Just the presence of lay people, especially women, will change the talk at the table.*

*Parishioners need to be able to appoint their own lay Parish Administrators and Parish Boards of Management.*

To enable all this to happen, some requested that better pathways for participation and leadership be established in all dioceses and for clergy to be trained to work collaboratively with the laity.

*To be responsive to the desires of lay people to serve by providing pathways and formation to informal and commissioned ministries.*

*The Church to accept that the laity are already and will increasingly do the functions that have traditionally been carried out by clergy and religious. We need to be respected in this and allowed the conditions to do it effectively.*

*Priest need to be trained to accept the equality of the laity in all areas of Church*



*life and to recognise the abilities that individuals have to contribute to the life of the parish through decision-making bodies such as councils, committees. Parishioners should not be seen as infantile, passive members of the community.*

Overall, participants felt that there was a strong need for the role of the laity to be expanded to all areas of Church life. A number of participants also believed that lay people needed to have their say in the selection and appointment of parish priests and bishops.

*To give the baptised a role in the governance of the church on a par with the ordained ... The Parish Pastoral Council to be involved in the appointment of the parish priest. The Deanery Pastoral Council to be involved in the appointment of the Dean and the Diocesan Pastoral Council to be involved in the appointment of the bishop.*

*The method of selection of bishops and leaders doesn't have any real input from the People of God, but is dominated by fellow bishops and clergy. The whole process of selection of bishops must be more representative and transparency must occur if the position of bishop is to have any true meaning for future generations.*

## Youth to be Involved More

As with lay people and particularly women, a group of participants discussed the need for young people to be involved more in the Church. This identified need emerged in several contexts in participants' responses. For example, the need for the Mass to be appealing to youth was discussed in Chapter 5. Similarly, Chapter 13 focuses entirely on youth

ministry and the call to offer better resources that encourage greater participation. Within the topic of leadership, however, participants were keenly aware of the need to keep the Church relevant to young people and looked for ways to do this.

There was great support for encouraging youth activities in parishes and creating pathways for younger people to get involved in leadership roles.

*By encouraging older Church members to allow, permit and encourage youthful members. By treating the young men and women as equals, giving them equal voice.*

*Involve the youth more in discussions at a parish level—not just having meetings that are run by adults, but meetings that have the youth in our communities taking an active part and having a strong voice in what they want, what they need to be a more active and faith-filled member of the Church community in our local parishes.*

Greater opportunities for faith formation and sharing of the faith were also recommended, as were paid ministry roles. Many advocated for creating opportunities for leadership and formation such as small jobs, to enable a sense of belonging and mission.

*Encourage young Catholics to become more involved. This could include subsidised education in their faith, meetings for them to meet with other young Catholics across several parishes to share experiences, opportunities for them to share their faith with fellow parishioners younger than themselves. Employment for youth leaders in parishes.*

Young people should be encouraged to see themselves as the future of the Church and to do

this there was a need to help them develop their skills to engage in ministry and to empower them to grow their faith:

*We need to commit to valuing our young people more, since the future of the Church is largely in their hands. We must ensure that they know they have a vocation to participate in the Church's mission of evangelising their world.*

*Invest in young people for study in theology and Scripture and employ them to use their knowledge*

Overall, it was felt that there was a strong need to value the input and ideas of young people. Some also believed that more had to be done to encourage vocations to priesthood and religious life from the younger generation.

## Greater Leadership from Bishops

There was a call from many participants for bishops to show greater leadership. Some voiced their disappointment at the bishops' handling of the clergy sex abuse crisis and asked for greater honesty, transparency and accountability in the handling of such critical issues.

*[The] role of bishops should change. Bishops need to be totally transparent! Their lack of openness about child abuse has had an impact on victims and discredited the Catholic Church in Australia. Bishops should have demonstrated strong leadership in addressing the crisis of sexual abuse but didn't.*

*I truly believe that our broken divided Catholic Church will never be healed until priests, bishops, archbishops [and] cardinals can stand up before us the laity*

*and say 'We were wrong'. To admit openly that victims of abuse were telling the truth. That abuse was hidden, denied, covered up. That perpetrators were moved from one parish to another. God is asking for transparency, honesty, humility.*

Greater transparency was also called for in issues pertaining to dioceses, especially those where appointment of a bishop was delayed.

A number of participants asked for bishops to lead through "simplicity", "humility" and "solidarity". They believed bishops needed to be "disciples rather than governors" and "leaders and teachers rather than princes". Several reiterated Pope Francis's call for bishops to "take on the 'smell of the sheep'" (EG24) and made suggestions for bishops to get closer to their priests and people through frequent parish visitations (not dictated by convenience, favouritism, cost or obligation) and honest and frank conversations. Some also suggested adopting a simpler mode of dress.

*Be accountable, transparent and inclusive. Be ready to act now, not at some time in the future. Bishops should subsidise therapy and supervision of clergy. Bishops should spend time getting to know all the baptised in their diocese and provide good leadership.*

*Bishops and priests are called upon more than ever to bear witness to the Gospel values of humility, service and solidarity with ordinary people, especially the poor—in fact and deed, not just in words. As Pope Paul VI once said, "The Church needs witnesses more than teachers"—now more than ever!*

An important aspect of leadership for bishops was the ability to defend the faith and a large number of



participants asked for them to have greater courage in doing this, particularly in matters regarding life, faith and marriage. Many believed bishops needed to refrain from pandering to the social or political ideologies of the day and there was quite strong criticism regarding their handling of recent issues. Several gave examples of the polls on same-sex marriage or the review into abortion legislation where people had failed to hear the reasons behind why they needed to vote against such policies.

*God is shocked at our Australian bishops/ Church for lack of true leadership; lack of accountability; lack of ... actioning on the key societal issues facing Australia.*

*Our faith is being attacked and targeted more so than ever at this time and this is the time for our bishops to speak the truth with love, even if others don't like it or disagree. If our leaders aren't willing to stand up for the faith, then what example do young people have to follow?*

Ambiguous statements by bishops and dioceses appeared to have left people feeling confused and some believed it had even led people astray. There was a strong call therefore for stronger leadership in this area and for bishops to witness to and uphold the teachings of the Church and to encourage their priests and parishioners to do likewise.

*We believe that God is asking each and*

*every bishop and archbishop to be much more vocal, both frequently at the Sunday Mass homilies and also in their publicised quotes and writings, in condemning and protesting the immorality of many practices that affect all Australian citizens.*

Some participants were acutely aware of the responsibilities and pressures on bishops especially in remote or isolated dioceses where a large percentage of the community was poor or disadvantaged. They therefore asked for greater support to be provided to them. Suggestions of a shorter tenure of about 10 years, mandatory professional supervision and greater support and accountability in administration through a “safety net” of Pastoral Councils and a Finance Committee were advocated.

### Greater Leadership from Priests

As with bishops, there was a strong appeal from many participants for priests to be courageous defenders of the faith. Many believed that some clergy had embraced clericalism or secularism, with the consequence of misleading people with false doctrines.

*Leaders in the Church, especially bishops, priests and consecrated members, need to be courageous in sharing their faith*

*without compromising on any of the more controversial topics as models for the rest of the members of the Church, especially those members who are disheartened or afraid to proclaim Christ's teachings.*

*[We need] priests and religious who truly love the Catholic Church and Her teachings, are living holy lives and who have the courage to publicly expound the Church's teachings on abortion, homosexuality, artificial contraception, sanctity of marriage, etc. Priests and religious who are inspirational in living out their faith.*

Many participants believed that greater witness by priests would be a strong catechetical opportunity for parishioners who would follow their example.

“Holiness”, “simplicity”, “humility”, “integrity” and “prayerfulness” were also some qualities that participants desired from their priests. There were also calls for priests to “be more real with the people” and therefore greater tolerance, understanding and more conversations were needed.

*The priest, as leader and teacher of the flock, needs to be in discussion with their [parishioners], not only about the peripheral organisation of parish affairs but on the content of his weekly sermons at Mass. He would benefit greatly by hearing input from his parishioners on all matters concerning family life, the impact of world events, the challenges of changes in theological thinking ... Yes, we are gifted with discernment and wisdom. Yes, we are spiritually mature and able to have a theological discussion. All of us have a wealth of experience upon which to draw.*

*Priests and religious are not to step back as a result of the Royal Commission, but to step forward, and be more “real” in their communities—be more like Jesus. Sit with families in their parishes, have meals, home Masses, spend time being with others. They need to demonstrate their humanity. Less focus on flamboyant vestments and raising money.*

Greater listening and service and solidarity with ordinary people, especially the poor, was also advocated strongly, as were suggestions such as “step down from the pulpit and speak to us, not at us” and “more emphasis on recognising that we are truly brothers and sisters”.

### More formation and support for priests

Several participants voiced a need for ongoing formation of priests. Many suggestions were made for formation in spirituality and Scripture to help them give better homilies and for their pastoral and personal skills to be developed. Skills in leadership methods, people management and the management of parishes and schools should also be developed.

*Priests and deacons to also get ongoing formation and support so that they [too] are aware of the rapid development of today's world, which will assist them in preaching to the people of today. Homilies that will be engaging and relevant, but of course spoken with love.*

Many people were concerned about their priests and there was a strong call for greater support for them, especially through more exposure to community life and ongoing personal development.



This support was especially needed for priests in rural and regional areas, where loneliness and isolation were concerning factors.

*We need to stop placing unrealistic demands on our parish priests, and look at ways to continuously support them. They should live in community and enjoy the fellowship of fellow priests to strengthen them in their mission.*

*Priests need more support—both personal and professional—including also ongoing professional development and compulsory supervision.*

*The development of a community for priests—it can be a lonely existence in rural and remote communities.*

Recommendations for support also included training the laity to take on more administrative tasks, sharing the workload between two or more parishes and offering diocesan priests options for superannuation and taking on responsibility for their own retirement plans.

### Better Selection and Formation of Candidates to Priesthood

The leadership of priests was considered to be greatly affected by their formation in the seminary. There were strong calls, therefore, for this training to be updated to meet the demands of contemporary pastoral situations.

Suggestions were made for the selection of candidates; these usually included a minimum adult entry age of 25 years, prior professional qualifications and work experience and psychological assessments.

*Seminarians' curriculum should include theology, philosophy, Scripture, canon law and human formation, relationships and vulnerability. Seminarians need professional training and input in ethics, morals and spiritual tasks. Seminarians need to demonstrate independence in living and financial affairs ... Seminarians need to have life experience before being ordained.*

*The selection and formation of priests must be re-examined. Proper psychological assessment should occur and not be ignored. Priests should have real life experiences before entering the priesthood. Those who come from other countries should be helped to understand Australian culture so as to properly respond to the needs of parishioners.*

There was a desire for more pastoral experience to be given in parishes and an increased role for women to be involved in formation. Training in a wide range of pastoral matters was recommended, as well as formation in human development. Recommendations for holistic training also included topics such as interpersonal relationships, issues affecting families, men, women, children, adolescents and the aged, financial and life stresses, drugs, mental health and sexuality.

### Greater Recognition of Eastern Catholic Churches

Only a few participants specifically discussed matters relating to the Eastern Churches. Those that did, however, believed that more recognition was due to these churches. There was great admiration of their defence of the faith and their ability to be

vibrant places of worship and community.

*One only needs to look at parishes that belong to the Maronite Eparchy or the Coptic Orthodox Church in Australia and witness the daily & hourly buzz around the parish grounds. Whilst you will find a very small percentage who can point to their Cathedral (seat of the bishop), you will however find a big percentage of their congregation on [a] first name basis with their parish priests.*

There was also great respect for the catechetical model followed in some churches where children and young people were taught the faith.

Some participants requested that more collaboration and greater links be developed with the Eastern Catholic Churches. Others asked that Australian bishops consider more seriously the Eastern Churches' model of married men being ordained:

*We need to dialogue closely with the Maronite and Melkite Rites of our Church in relation to married priests. Having taught and worked with students, families, and clergy from these rites, we have among us here in Australia different models of Church that are successful and their long tradition worthy of deep listening and reflection.*

### New Leadership and Governance Model

A significant theme within the topic of leadership was for numerous changes to be made to the leadership and decision-making processes within the Church. Some of these changes, such as an increased role for women in leadership and governance and an increased role for young people, have been discussed in earlier sections of this chapter.

Many participants believed that a review of governance and leadership policies of the Church was required. There was a strong need to discard the old hierarchical model and develop an entirely new one:

*To re-found the Church based on the life of Jesus, comprised of small, inclusive Christian communities modelling servant leadership and new governance that welcomes all, valuing the gifts of the people.*

A number of recommendations were made for this new leadership model. For many, this model had to “mirror the people of God”, with a better system for the selection of leaders. Numerous ideas included a reduced role for priests, equality of men and women, married and celibate, lay and clergy alike, greater co-responsibility and collaboration, appropriate levels of responsibility, accountability and transparency, and for the laity to have an equal vote in decisions. The responses below are some examples of these suggestions:

*Canon law needs to be changed; that will permit the roles of administering the community to be shared more widely between laity (male and female) and clergy.*

*The leadership of the community would be best carried out by a team: it would coordinate the liturgical, sacramental and pastoral activities of the parish community. The administrator would be a full-time employee of the parish ... with good interpersonal skills ... The parish community needs a focus. This will be a person with leadership and interpersonal skills, a person who can inspire others and encourage them to participate in various aspects of parish life. This person could most appropriately be the ordained minister*



*and would be a member of the leadership team ... None of these functions needs to be a lifetime commitment, none of them requires a commitment to celibacy, none of them is gender-specific.*

*We need to hand over all temporal authority in the Church to the laity and free priests and religious to exercise pastoral and sacramental ministries. This will also free them from the scandal created by any financial impropriety or other abuses of power.*

*At a national level, the Conference of Bishops requires modernisation in two directions. Internally, it should fairly and realistically represent the Catholic people and so include lay people, of whom women make up a majority, religious and Catholic organisations, and priests as well as bishops ... Externally, the Conference has to have due authority to administer, govern and lead the Church in Australia, [be] able to make its own rules in relation to the particular circumstances and needs prevailing here and equipped to respond to issues and challenges as they arise.*

### Diocesan Pastoral Council

At a diocesan level, there was a strong desire for a Diocesan Pastoral Council to be established with Parish Councils in every parish.

*To form a cooperative structure of bishop, priests, religious and laity to lead and oversight the leadership and management of the Church. This could be done by a group of people working together as a Pastoral Council of the diocese or as a group of 6 or 8 on an elected 'Board'. There*

*would be an equal number of women and laity.*

*Every parish should have an elected pastoral council, which functions as a decision-making body. Every diocese should have active deaneries and a Pastoral Commission representing all sections of the Church, according equal representation to the laity, in recognition of their baptismal call to missionary discipleship.*

*We also need parishes to be more democratic, with a democratically elected Pastoral Council which manages the parish, has a right to be heard in the selection/appointment of the parish priest, administrator, assistant priest(s), and in their removal if they are not meeting the pastoral needs of their parish community.*

Several participants agreed that the people on these governance structures had to be democratically elected and that clergy had to be accountable to these Councils. There were some alternate models of Parish Pastoral Councils suggested that are discussed in Chapter 15 relating to Parishes.

### Better use of finances

Among the suggestions underpinning a new leadership and governance model, financial accountability was paramount. Participants also saw a great need for a Finance Council in every diocese and parish to oversee finances and prevent misuse. It was also essential to find better ways of equalising the finances of parishes so that smaller ones could afford staff and other resources. Suggestions were also made to update accounting systems and broaden the use of all church-owned property to support the needs of local communities.



*God is asking that finances in parishes are transparent to all parishioners. Finance committees, chosen by the people with a few appointees by the priest, should exist in all parishes. A financial report which is clear and transparent should be available to all every year, listing all income and expenditure for the parish.*

*All Church organisations need to be transparent and accountable in their processes, their finances and their employment and deployment of people. The prime measure of accountability must be service of Christ's mission.*

"Honesty", "openness" and "humility" were necessary qualities for leaders throughout the ranks of the Church to reduce the feeling of division between the laity and the institutional Church. People also advocated for better communication and an end to the culture of secrecy.

### New Model of Church, Diocese, Parish

In relation to a new leadership and governance model, there were several new structures of parish,

diocese and Church proposed by some participants. Examples of these are as follows:

- **No parish, only "base ecclesial communities"**— In this model, parishes are replaced by small instances of "local church", such as Catholic schools, new communities and movements or groups meeting together in homes.
- **Autonomous Australian Catholic Church** — This model of the Australian Church is completely detached from Rome and all decisions are made locally.
- **Parish and school combined into a "new Christian community"** — This model does away with parish structures and uses a circular model of community as its base. These communities would form wherever there is need for one. A suggestion for larger communities encompassing the church and many neighbourhood schools was to form "deanery centres".
- **"Parish clubs"** — In this model, the parish structure is expanded and developed to include cafés, meetings rooms, lounges, libraries and sports facilities.
- **Secular management of the Church, "Laicise the Church!"** — In this model, the institutional power and control of the Church hierarchy would



be decoupled from the sacramental powers of the priesthood and only laity would be in charge at all levels.

- **“Independent Catholic churches”** – Parishioners “own” their parish in this model and have all the authority for decision-making. Parishes are led by visionary leaders and are built on already-thriving Catholic communities.

There were also suggestions for an “inverted pyramid” model of Church with the laity at the top. This model is discussed in Chapter 16.

Another suggestion was for an integrated model of hierarchy and community that amended the current structures, bringing in changes where necessary. It was explained as follows:

*The challenge systemically is to modify/moderate our hierarchy with community involvement at all times, our bureaucracy with on-site service, our patriarchy with inclusivity of all and our gerontocracy with the empowering and resourcing the younger members ... Real, on-site, on-the-ground support must be given to parishes to relieve the increasing management demands, freeing people and leaders up to do what matters and unites us in Christ ... What is required is not just change but a change of heart. The old model of governance within the Church must be left behind ... People ... want to feel that they are a part of what is happening, and they want to use their often very considerable skills, talents and experience to help the Church move forward so that the serious shortcomings in the past will not be repeated.*

## Adapting to Multicultural Reality

Another recommendation from participants was for a Church that acknowledges the changing reality of Australian society and embraces the inclusion of people of all cultures.

*Today’s Church is multicultural—present and future reality. Utilise the skills and talents of people in our churches, especially migrants. Identify opportunities to unify, link, ground and provide outreach to build and strengthen this multicultural society.*

Greater welcoming of migrants and refugees and including them in leadership and decision-making positions was considered to be essential. There was also a need for openness to welcome and accept practices and traditions brought in by migrants that were lost in the Australian churches or not practiced at all. Greater kindness and respect for others and tolerance of diversity were also encouraged.

*To be a Church of welcome and inclusive of all cultures that grows in understanding and acceptance, sharing in Eucharist and liturgy, social events and encounters. This will bring about a strong faith within families and reduce isolation within cultural minorities.*

*Welcome diversity, the new migrants to Australia can bring their cultural traditions and they too can participate in liturgy.*

## Becoming a Vatican II Church

Several participants spoke about the need to realise more fully the dream of Vatican II and to work towards truly becoming a Vatican II church in Australia. This included implementing ideas such as greater inclusiveness, listening and collaboration with the laity.

*Being proactive in the implementation of Vatican II philosophy, ideas, practices and openness, where everyone is valued and no-one is excluded for any reason.*

*Listening to the ‘sensus fidelium’.*

*[Stopping] rituals, traditions and ideas that are being reintroduced into the liturgy and parishes [that] are from 60 years ago.*

People spoke of the need to develop a synodal model of Church and renew ministries from within the community. There was a need to reaffirm strongly the principles, intentions and documents of the Vatican Council II with a view to their ongoing implementation throughout teaching institutions, parishes and Church decision-making bodies in Australia.

## Working Together in Unity

The final theme within Leadership and Church Governance was for everyone in the Church to work together in unity. People spoke of the sadness of seeing bishops, priests, lay people and communities divided over several issues.

*Pope Francis made sure that in the synod on the family there were members who held different/opposing stances on major issues. He permits Latin Masses and encourages many forms of devotions. There is a core to our faith which supersedes these important differences. God loves all those Catholics whose practices and spiritualities are different from mine. Look at the numerous cultures, ages, life journeys.*

*Divisiveness about differences in theology and nit-picking application of rules is not of Christ.*

*God is asking for his Church in Australia to ‘get its house in order’, to be a Church for and by the people. He is asking that we come together across this vast country ... and get past the issues of the past—not hide them, own them—and to be transparent to the community. He is asking us to go forth as Christians and take His word to as many as possible.*

There were suggestions made, therefore, to focus on love of neighbour rather than doctrine and dogma, and to be more tolerant with one another and quick to forgive. “I pray that they may be one as we are one” (Jn 17) was a phrase often quoted within this theme.

*Unify the approach for the future, so that all priests and laity are ‘on the same page’. At present, each diocese and even each parish follows its own rules set by the bishop or, in some cases, the parish priest. The Church must come together in order to survive.*

*We Catholics need to return to our mission as we strive to achieve ‘One Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church’. ‘One’ indicates unity. Division brings disunity. If disunity becomes a way of life, each one strives to care for oneself.*

There was an urgent need seen for a concerted effort to bring together the two factions of ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’ Catholics under stronger episcopal leadership that had credibility. Participants also suggested a need to “allow the Holy Spirit to move” within ministries and groups and for a greater respect of all communities and people serving God in some way. Bishops and priests needed to lead this movement and help stop the divisions. In addition, there was a strong need to stop labelling people as “traditional”, “charismatic” and “Latin” Catholics.

## Conclusion

This chapter discussed the themes relating to leadership and Church governance. Concerns of clericalism were widely discussed within the issue of Church leadership. Participants associated clericalism with a boys' club mentality, cronyism or social elitism, while others referenced the ornate vestments worn by bishops and cardinals. Many participants perceived clericalism as a form of exclusion that elevated priests and bishops to a higher status, giving them a sense of power and elitism that fostered a lack of accountability. One way in which participants believed clericalism could be counteracted was through a servant model of leadership that focused on humble service and building up the community. This would facilitate greater transparency, honesty, humility and accountability and would allow leaders to listen to and collaborate with all lay people.

Participants also strongly advocated for a greater role for women in many areas of Church life, including governance, decision-making and senior administration, and as deacons, acolytes and priests. They believed this would foster a greater sense of equality within the Church community, offer solutions to the current lack of priests and possibly prevent events such as the sexual abuse crisis from repeating. Many participants also believed that it was important for the Church to give greater affirmation to the role of women, recognising their valuable contribution in parishes and communities across Australia.

For many participants a critical aspect of leadership was a greater involvement of the laity. Lay people were called to have a greater involvement in teaching and preaching roles, in senior leadership and administrative positions, in celebrating sacraments and even in the selection of priests and bishops. Involving lay people would allow them to bring their individual skills and life experience to different positions and be a support for priests in parish ministry and evangelisation efforts. It would also help reduce clericalism within the Church hierarchy. Participants also felt it was important to boost youth involvement in all aspects of Church life, including paid ministry roles, which would foster the next generation of Church leaders and encourage more vocations to priesthood and religious life.

A number of participants' submissions focused on a need for greater leadership from bishops and priests, calling for more transparency, honesty, humility and accountability. There was also a recognition that bishops and priests needed to show leadership in defending Church teachings in the face of secular ideologies. Some participants believed that priests needed ongoing training and formation, and greater support, especially in rural and regional areas. A few participants also believed that many of their concerns regarding Church leadership could be alleviated by a better selection process of candidates for the priesthood and through formation in human development and in a wide range of pastoral matters.

Several participants desired a new leadership and governance model that included equal membership of men and women, married and celibate, lay and clergy alike, with greater co-responsibility and collaboration and appropriate levels of responsibility, accountability and transparency. There were also calls for mandatory Diocesan Pastoral Councils and for Church finances to be utilised appropriately. Several new structures of parish, diocese and Church were proposed. There were also calls made for a greater recognition of Eastern Catholic Churches and for more efforts to become a true Vatican II Church. Participants also recommended that the Church leaders embrace Australia's multicultural reality with a greater welcome of migrants and refugees and by including them in Church leadership positions. Finally, participants wanted all members of the Church community to work together in unity, focusing more on the love of neighbour and being attentive to the Holy Spirit rather than on dogmatic differences and other divisive tendencies.

## QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- Our parish clergy are overworked, stressed and stretched beyond reasonable limits. Moving beyond strategies of parish amalgamation and closure, what other options will we explore—and by that I mean, the non-ordained role in making pastoral decisions?
- [Can we] decrease authority in [the] Church hierarchy and give some authority to the people?
- How can women be included into the governance of the Church at the highest levels?
- How can a more synodal approach to leadership in the Church at parish and diocesan levels be exercised as a shared responsibility, by virtue of Baptism, between both lay and clergy?
- How can cultures of clericalism be replaced with healthier approaches to, understandings of and practices in the priesthood?
- How will the Church honour laypeople within its leadership structures, ecclesial ministry and works?
- How do we provide much better support for priests new to their role as leaders; priests in a new country; priests new to a diocese or different place?
- How do we empower our youth to take on more of a leadership role?



## RECOMMENDED READING

This report examines the experiences of Mass attenders toward possible barriers preventing women from taking on leadership roles in the Church by examining responses to a question commissioned by the ACBC Office for the Participation of Women in the 2016 National Church Life Survey.

*Reid, Stephen and Trudy Dantis. 2018. "Mass Attenders' Experiences of Possible Barriers to Women and Leadership Roles in the Church. A Report to the Office for the Participation of Women on Questions Included in the 2016 National Church Life Survey". ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)*

Analysing responses of three questions commissioned by the ACBC Office for Youth in the 2016 National Church Life Survey, this report explores attenders' views on their future involvement in the Catholic Church, what they value about being Catholic and who have been the strongest supporters in their faith journey.

*Reid, Stephen and Trudy Dantis. 2018. "Mass Attenders' Faith and Future Involvement in the Catholic Church. A Report to the Office for Youth on Questions Included in the 2016 National Church Life Survey". ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)*

This topic report, from the Building Stronger Parishes research project, examines the different ways in which leadership operates in different parishes and the ways in which various models influence the vitality of a parish.

*Dantis, Trudy. 2015. "Building Stronger Parishes: Project Topic Report 5: Leadership". ACBC Pastoral Research Office. Available to purchase at <https://www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Building-Stronger-Parishes-Report-5-Leadership/p/57454487/category=4727032>*

This first apostolic exhortation by Pope Francis calls for the entire Church to be missionary disciples and to joyfully evangelise the Gospel.

*Francis. 2013. Evangelii Gaudium. Vatican website. November 24. Available at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco-esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco-esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)*

This book, published in 1999, is the result of the findings of a research project which investigated the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia, and is one of the most comprehensive reports of research projects ever undertaken. Findings related to ways in which women's participation in the Church can be increased can be found in chapter 9.8.

*Macdonald, Marie, Peter Carpenter, Sandi Cornish, Michael Costigan, Robert Dixon, Margaret Malone, Kevin Manning and Sonia Wagner. 1999. "Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus". Harper Collins Religious. A full version of the publication can be downloaded from: <https://www.opw.catholic.org.au/treasures/woman-and-man>*

## Stories of Faith

*We had a wonderful parish priest. His humility, willingness to serve, selflessness and compassion changed my life at a time when I was considering looking for an alternative parish or maybe even denomination. He was so welcoming and made every person in our large parish feel important to God. He was so understanding towards families and made every child feel important. He wasn't stern if they made a noise and we had 120 altar servers. He worked hard to make Mass relevant to everyone. He was a great motivator of people and because of the way he radiates the love of Christ people wanted to be involved. He is my spiritual advisor and friend. We keep him in touch even though they moved him over 100 km away from our parish. He still makes himself available to people if they need him. Many regularly drive the distance to see him. He taught me that humility, gentleness, patience and love are the key to closeness to Jesus. He always said it was our parish, not 'my' parish. It made such a difference. Unfortunately, he was compulsorily transferred after a long time in our parish. Priests who are part of the parish community, not set apart from the community make such a difference. He taught me not to be judgemental due to his example. Our parish was so enriched by him. We miss him greatly.*

*"We keep him in touch even though they moved him over 100 km away from our parish."*



## SEXUAL ABUSE AND THE ROYAL COMMISSION

A critical issue raised by participants was the sexual abuse scandal and the subsequent Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. While it is acknowledged that clergy, religious and lay people were responsible for the perpetration of sexual abuse within the Church, participants' submissions focused on abuse perpetrated by clergy in particular. The participants identified a need for the whole Catholic community to be called to repentance and for the Church hierarchy to have a greater concern for victims and survivors of clergy sexual abuse. There were also suggestions for the Church to lead healing liturgies and partake in public acts of reparation. A number of people identified the need for more transparency, accountability, balanced news reporting of the crisis and more study of the causes and implications of child sexual abuse. There was also a call for the Church to do better in implementing the Royal Commission's recommendations. Participants also felt that the Catholic community needed to move beyond the scandal and that the general public needed to stop inferring that all people connected with the Catholic Church were paedophiles. Finally, there was a desire from some for greater care to be offered to convicted paedophile priests.

### Call to Repentance for Clergy Sexual Abuse

A noteworthy number of participants felt it was crucial that the Church hierarchy show repentance for the clergy sexual abuse scandal. Many participants felt that the Church hierarchy needed to

be held "accountable" and be more "empathetic" in their attempts at repentance.

*The hierarchy needs to really listen to the people and learn how to build trust again after the scandals of clerical abuse—the lives ruined both physically and psychologically. There is a need for real*

*accountability and openness within church management. Bishops need to listen with compassion and empathy. Not just say 'sorry' but 'do' sorry.*

*Show repentance for the wrongs of the Church in Australia and the world. The leadership has failed to lead ... Bishops should teach, guide and correct the priests and faithful citizens.*

Some participants also took collective responsibility for the crisis, calling for the whole Church community to repent and accept responsibility. One participant stated:

*As [the] Church we publicly admit and acknowledge that we, the Church, are a sinful people. Many lives have been ruined through sexual, emotional and physical abuse, and discrimination by clergy, religious [and] lay people holding a position of responsibility and trust.*

### Greater Concern for Victims and Survivors

Many participants felt that there needed to be increased concern for the victims and survivors of clergy sexual abuse. Participants believed that greater "acknowledgement" was necessary to achieve this, as one participant stated:

*Acknowledge the hurt, pain and ache that people are suffering as a result of the sins of the fathers, sins related to the sexual abuse, the cover-up of the sexual abuse and the wider, more entrenched clericalism, abuse of power and systemic dysfunction.*

Moreover, participants felt that every effort was needed to "support, listen and care" for the victims. For example:

*We're living in the wake of the greatest possible disaster that could have descended upon the Church in this country*



*(the sexual abuse crisis). Firstly, I think God wants every possible effort to be directed towards offering assistance to victims of abuse in the Church. Secondly, I think that God wants us as a Church collective to hang our head in shame.*

One suggested way of supporting victims was through the Church participating in public acts of reparation.

## Healing Liturgies and Public Signs or Acts of Reparation

Participants had many suggestions for the Church to conduct public acts of reparation for the victims and survivors of clergy sexual abuse. This included a “national day of reconciliation” for the victims and a “national public apology circulated in newspapers” around Australia. Furthermore, participants felt that “public liturgies” in prominent Australian capital cities could also offer opportunities for healing. For example, as one participant stated:

*Do an act of public penance for the sins committed by their brother bishops and by priests over the past decades in relation to child abuse and associated cover-ups ... A week of genuine prayer and fasting on the street? This would show true leadership and repentance and possibly allow a level of healing to occur. It may also spark similar acts of penitence and repentance elsewhere.*

Finally, participants felt that there could be ongoing public acts of reparation through the Mass. As one participant suggested:

*We need to have built into ‘Prayers of the Faithful’, an apology and recognition of the past atrocities and abuse of children in the care of Catholic institutions.*

## More Transparency and Accountability Regarding Clergy Sexual Abuse

A significant issue raised relating to the clergy sexual abuse crisis was for the Church to be more transparent. As one participant stated:

*We believe God is calling the official hierarchical Church and religious orders to [be] honest, transparent and repent for the perpetration and cover-up of abuse of our children and for betraying the trust of God’s people.*

There were also calls for the Church to be more accountable for its actions. For example:

*The things that happened regarding [the] sexual abuse of children [are] unforgivable. The Church should have acted. Nothing like this should ever happen again. Those who didn’t act when made aware of what was happening should also be held responsible—they should be made accountable.*

There were also calls for consideration of the public reporting of the sexual abuse crisis. Participants were adamant that the action of the offenders and the Church’s response were “unacceptable”. Yet there was also a concern that the news reporting of the crisis has not always been truthful.

*[The] general community thinks about two-thirds of sexual abuse was perpetrated in*

*the Catholic Church, whereas it’s one-third, a misunderstanding of the statistics ... The Church should nevertheless look at all the recommendations on the final report and they should be widely discussed in the Church so as not to rush ahead without a thorough study for future practice.*

## More Study on Causes and Implications of Child Sexual Abuse

Many participants wanted the Church to have “a greater understanding” of how this crisis might have happened. Some participants called for the Church to consider and study cases of child sexual abuse and understand what the consequences were to victims moving forward. As one participant stated:

*I think God wants us to examine how this disaster could have ever become so pronounced.*

Another participant suggested the Church invest in education resources to understand better what had happened and the consequences of the crisis:

*Expedite a process of fundamental and theological and interdisciplinary reflection about the causes and implications of the child sexual abuse crisis, and discern new theological approaches to the body, sexuality, gender and the child that are informed by contemporary experience and scientific understanding, not just Scripture and tradition. Involve other churches, and also civil governments, in funding and creating special centres for research to inform improved teaching practice in governance and ministry and also to*

*provide training, accreditation, professional development and best practice.*

## Better Implementation of Royal Commission Recommendations

A significant number of participants felt that it was imperative for the Church to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission. As one participant stated “[h]ave faith in the Royal Commission and follow its recommendations”. There were also concerns that the Church leadership would not fully cooperate with the legal consequences of the Royal Commission’s findings:

*[God] is asking that spirit, integrity and authenticity continue with the implementation of all supported and accepted recommendations of the Royal Commission into child sexual abuse. That we also actively identify and quash attempts within the Church of using double talk, legalese to sidestep the challenges of the recommendations.*

## Healing and Moving Beyond the Clergy Sexual Abuse Scandal

Some participants felt that the Church needed to “ask for forgiveness”, “look to make peace”, “facilitate a healing process for the individuals” that have been hurt through clergy sexual abuse and then “move forward”. Participants felt that in order to move forward, the whole Church community needed to “look to learn” and “make a better future” for the Catholic Church in Australia. For some, being able to move forward could be achieved through prayer:

*Pray especially for the people who [were] involved in the scandals which the Church*

*has been suffering through. To be open to change and have a change of heart—to accept that mistakes have been made but we must look to rectify and learn from the mistakes of the past.*

In summing up, some participants felt that there needed to be an acknowledgement of past mistakes, an attempt to heal the wrongs that have been committed and then a move forward into the future.

### Not Treating all People or Priests as Paedophiles

A few participants were concerned about the labelling of priests and the wider Catholic Church as sex offenders. One participant echoed this point as follows:

*Stop treating everyone, especially volunteers, as if they were paedophiles and abusers and treat them as responsible people.*

Another participant highlighted that the majority of the Church community were law-abiding citizens and wanted the Church to “[r]epair the damage of the 7%. Proclaim the goodness of [the] 93% ”.

### Care for Paedophile Priests

The final theme within the topic Sexual Abuse and the Royal Commission was the broader Catholic community’s concern for the care of convicted paedophile priests. For example, one participant said that the Church needed to “find a common approach to respectfully and truthfully look after convicted paedophile priests”. Another participant highlighted the importance of ensuring a “connection between God and convicted priests”. This participant affirmed their “[s]upport of offenders. I believe it is important to forgive and assist people to maintain their relationship with God”. Finally, participants felt that there needed to be “compassion”, “context” and “perspective” given to every situation:

*More needs to be done for the healing of perpetrators so they will not re-offend. Many of these priests have been sexually abused by their own fathers as children. Inner healing prayer sessions should be more openly promoted and available to those priests who desire and seek healing for themselves.*

### Conclusion

The clergy sexual abuse scandal and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was a critical topic that many people discussed in their responses to Plenary Council 2020’s Listening and Dialogue phase. Participants called for the hierarchy and the whole Church to repent for what took place. There were also many participants who believed that there needed to be greater concern, acknowledgment and support offered to victims and survivors of clergy sexual abuse. There were also suggestions that the Church should hold public liturgies for the victims along with organised public acts of reparation through Masses and ‘Prayers of the Faithful’. Participants called for greater transparency and accountability from the Church concerning the crisis.

Some participants voiced concerns that the reporting of the crisis needed to be more balanced. There was also a belief that there needed to be greater understanding of the causes and implications of clergy sexual abuse. Some participants emphasised the need for the Church to follow the recommendations of the Royal Commission. There were also calls for healing and moving beyond the scandal. Participants highlighted the need to acknowledge past mistakes, heal past wrongs and for the Church to move forward in the future. Concerns were raised by participants regarding labelling the whole Catholic Church as paedophiles. Finally, some participants believed that it was important to support and care for convicted paedophile priests. This included allowing for the context of each case and ensuring that each convicted paedophile priest can maintain a connection to God.



## QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- Is the Church willing to hold priests and religious accountable for their actions regarding the abuse of children?
- What changes will be made to ensure this?
- How does the Church plan to address the issue of sex offenders within the Church and how will it support their victims?
- What safeguards will the Church put in place to prevent abuses and failings from happening again?
- How will trust be restored?
- Can we implement all the recommendations of the Royal Commission seeing the Commission as a prophetic call to a complete, humbling refounding of the Church?
- Will the Church fully compensate those victims of child sexual abuse on behalf of those individuals who were found guilty?
- Will the Church apologise for past indiscretions in a genuine manner?

## RECOMMENDED READING

This report examines Mass attenders' attitudes to various issues relating to the clergy sexual abuse crisis by exploring attenders' responses to seven questions commissioned by the Truth Justice and Healing Council in the 2016 National Church Life Survey. The same or similar questions were asked in previous surveys, so comparative results are also presented throughout the report.

*Dixon, Robert and Reid Stephen. 2018. "Mass Attenders' Responses to the Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis". A Report to the Truth Justice and Healing Council on Questions Included in the 2016 National Church Life Survey. ACBC Pastoral Research Office. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)*

## Stories of Faith

*Failure of the Church to demonstrate Christian values. My sister is a survivor of terrible abuse by a Catholic priest who was found guilty and is now in gaol for a long time. My sister was forced to follow a rule of the Church back then, to visit confessions regularly as, if sins were not heard and forgiven, you could go to hell. It was in one of these confessional hearings that the abuse took place. Another reason why the Church needed to change some of the ways of thinking. I have sat with her on numerous occasions and attempted to support her through an horrific ordeal as she has, over the last two years, been called to travel to --- and talk to strange people about her story of abuse which happened over 50 years ago. My sister's mental health has suffered since the abuse and her life has taken many downward spirals as a result of not getting help back then because no one would believe her story. It appears even now no one believes her story as she has been interrogated, time and time again, by very well-paid lawyers sent down from ---, paid by the Catholic Church, and constantly trying to undermine her statements. Not one ounce of compensation has come her way and I am to believe that is the case with many of the women involved. She has told me the percentage of survivors who have taken their own lives, has increased in the last year. My sister has lost all sense of trust in the Church and does not know who to turn to, to feel safe and believed. As a family we support and love her dearly but her trust issues will never be repaired and I feel to this day—50 years on—her life is very vulnerable. How do we help her as Church?*

*"My sister has lost all sense of trust in the Church and does not know who to turn to."*



# SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

A number of responses through the Listening and Dialogue process addressed the topics of social justice and the environment. Participants shared a passion for a range of issues such as the need for the Church to have greater inclusion of all people and to end the discrimination of LGBTI people. Various responses also identified the need for the Church to have a stronger focus on human rights issues and greater promotion of peace and harmony in society. There were also calls to reduce inequality in society, exercise greater care and respect for the environment and promote a renewed defence of religious freedom and right-to-life issues in Australia. Finally, participants felt that there needed to be greater care and support for families and, in tackling social issues, a concerted effort to put Gospel values into action.

## Greater Inclusion of All

A significant theme of the topic of social justice and the environment was a belief that the Church community should exercise greater inclusion of all. Participants referred to greater inclusion of “all sexual preferences” and “genders”, “the marginalised”, “refugees” and “the poor”. For example, one participant stated:

*There is a perception that the Church is judgemental, especially in matters to do with relationships (same-sex relationships; premarital sex; divorce; practice of contraception in ways not prescribed by the Church). The Church in Australia needs to find a way in which people in situations like these are made to feel included and not feel like the lepers of Jesus' time—shunned by the 'righteous'.*

*I think God is asking us to have a Church for all where everyone is welcomed, included and valued equally, wherever they are on their life journey (e.g. sexuality, marital status) ... I think God is asking us to reach out as a Church to others outside our congregation and be 'Christ' to them, particularly the marginalised e.g. homeless, refugees etc.*

Participants were clear that “greater inclusion of all” referred to a wide cross-section of the Australian community. A further issue raised was the need to include and embrace “Australia’s multicultural communities” and to “[p]romote unity of all different cultures”.

*God is asking us to be open and welcoming to people from different races, cultures, faiths and sexual orientations. God tells us to love another as Christ loves you and to*

*love our neighbour. God is asking us to be more welcoming and non-judgemental.*

Participants felt that there also needed to be greater care and inclusion for community members with disabilities. One participant explained that the Church needed to:

*Be open to all, especially respect those whose disabilities may be impairing. Recognise the myriad of gifts that are present within those who have any type of disability.*

Some participants believed that it was especially important to allow and encourage easy access to the sacraments for people with disabilities. As one participant stated: “people with intellectual disability—that they have equal rights within the Church, especially to receive the sacraments”.



## Ending Discrimination of LGBTI

Many participants responded that God was asking for the “discrimination of the LGBTI community to end”. A number of participants felt that there needed to be a greater effort made to include people of all sexual orientations. Participants particularly referenced the Church’s marginalisation of the LGBTI community. As one participant stated:

*That all our liturgies be places of hospitality and welcome, for all people, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and especially for those traditionally marginalised—those divorced and remarried, and LGBTQI members.*

*We believe in a public apology and active reconciliation attempts for people who have experienced hate among the Church such as people who are LBGTQI+.*

Many participants also felt that there should be no discrimination towards the LGBTI community within Catholic schools. Echoing this point was this participant’s response:

*We need to be teaching our children tolerance [and] acceptance of all people and equality for all. It is very hard to do this when the Church itself advocates for discrimination in its schools ... If a student at a Catholic school identifies as LGBTQI then that student should be supported in whatever way that student needs, not just in ways the Church deems appropriate ... Heterosexual teachers should not [be] employed over a more qualified gay candidate, just because of their sexuality. It is not up to us to judge people. Jesus asked us to love one another and to treat others as we would like to be treated. This*

*is what the Church should be teaching in our schools.*

A reason for ending this discrimination, which is captured in the quote below, was to “act more like Jesus” and “love one another”.

*A missionary outreach Church that, like Jesus, can look outside the official rules, laws and rituals of established religion, to be pastoral and spiritual companions to each other and those on the margins. We need to be inclusive and welcoming to those shunned or hurt by Church teachings including the LGBT community and divorced and remarried Catholics.*

These sentiments are also a feature of the theme “put Gospel values into action”, which is expanded further below. Ending discrimination and having greater inclusion for members of the LGBTI community was a significant topic discussed during Plenary Council 2020’s Listening and Dialogue sessions, which sees this issue span across other chapters including “Catholic education in schools” (Chapter 14) and “bringing the Church into the 21st century” (Chapter 16).

## Fighting for Human Rights Issues

Many participants felt that a core mission of the Church, which needed renewing, was the “fight for human rights issues”. Human rights issues raised included support for “refugees and asylum seekers under Australian jurisdiction and across the world”, “the homeless” and “people suffering from famine”. Such human rights concerns are reflected in this participant’s response, who is urging the Australian community to:

*Look after the poor and marginalised people in society and speak out if others don’t. I think it’s a disgrace that in a rich country such as Australia we have so many homeless people and a charity such as The Smith Family exists needing to help marginalised Australian children.*

*Be more vocal in the public arena from a minority position. As a minority in Australia today we have a great opportunity to champion the causes and lead the conversation around other minorities and injustices—e.g. homelessness, the environment, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, refugees.*

*This is essential if we are to be Gospel people where we are inclusive of everyone – the poor, disabled, refugees, Indigenous,*

*the elderly and any groups who are marginalised all have a place within our Church. For so many of these groups they struggle to have a voice, to be heard and to be involved.*

Some felt that the Church community needed to be more attentive to the needs of the poor, terminally ill, the young and “those who needed help most”. There were also considerations given to the rights of the elderly in the community. As one participant stated:

*Grandparents, veterans [and] elderly parishioners ... can play a vital role in the parish ... the parish should ensure that the whole community is well looked after, especially elderly people. Ideas include better access to Catholic nursing homes,*





*where elderly patients are able to receive the sacraments [and] ... parents and young adults should be encouraged to help bring elderly parishioners to church.*

The sentiments of inclusion, care, compassion and support for all was reflected across all of the above themes.

## Living in Peace and Harmony

A major narrative of the “social justice and the environment” topic was “inclusivity” that was reflected in many participants wishes to “live in peace and harmony”. For the Church to be successful in Australia, participants felt that there needed to be:

*... peace and harmony in our world ... [through living] a Christian life and demonstrating our values and faith in action. Spreading peace and harmony could be achieved through respect for all and caring for others.*

One participant stated that we needed to be more like God and be:

*Kind, caring and never let someone down ... Donate food for people who don't have any. Pray for sick people, especially those who are alone and don't have anyone to pray for them. Pray for the helpless and those who are in any danger ... To have peace in our community and respect everyone for who they are ... Help the homeless and those who need help, especially our farmers.*

## Reduce Margins Between Rich and Poor

A pressing social issue highlighted by many participants was the need to “reduce the margins between the rich and the poor”. A typical response relating to the social concerns of inequality was:

*... the divide between rich and poor is killing our communities and we need help. The Church can be the one stable help.*

Participants felt that one way in which the margins between the rich and poor could be bridged was by a more generous Church community.

*God wants us to stop taking and to start giving, we take from the land we take from each other and we give so little back.*

Participants also felt that Australia being a wealthy country could “circulate its wealth more”. Spreading the wealth of the nation could, as one participant stated, “create an inclusive and equitable society ... [and] challenge capitalism and its inequity”. A benefit of reducing the margins between the rich and poor for many participants was that Australia would produce a “fairer and [more] equitable democracy”.

## Care for the Environment

Plenary Council participants felt that all Catholics had a role to play in caring for the environment. Many participants felt the Catholic Church could contribute to a “heightened awareness of climate issues”. For example, one participant stated that the community needs to:

*Care for Mother Earth—use resources appropriately, recycle, promote theology and heighten awareness of conservation.*

Another participant felt that it was important for the Church community to have “responsible resource management practices” and be “good stewards of the earth’s resources”.

A significant number of participants felt that the Catholic Church needed to show “greater leadership” on climate change. A typical reason from many participants highlighting the need for greater concern for climate change was that all in the Church community needed to “care for all of God’s creation”.

Some participants who highlighted environmental issues referenced Pope Francis’s second encyclical *Laudato Si’*. For example, one participant stated:

*Proclaim the messages of Pope Francis’s Laudato Si’ to all the faithful in such way that they accept that care for the environment is integral to the Gospel and they actively work for this pressing need.*

The thinking that environmental care is fundamental to the Gospel places the responsibility of climate change on all parish members. As demonstrated by this response:

*God is asking the Church in Australia to do something, quickly and now, about climate change. To stay relevant with the young then big efforts must be made, starting at parish level, to alleviate carbon emissions ... Each parish could begin with simple things such as banning single use plastic bags, separating rubbish and recycling more, installing water tanks for cleaning and watering and installing PV panels to offset emissions and electricity*

*costs ... Encourage parishioners to be more involved in local tree planting and bush regeneration projects as part of their mission. Walk to Mass more often. We are running out of time!*

## Defending Religious Freedom

Participants were concerned that not enough was being done to “defend religious freedoms”. This was particularly the case for a number of participants who believed that Australia was growing more secular. As one participant stated:

*I think that God is asking of us down here in Australia to be attentive towards Christian persecution and religious freedom, especially as our nation is becoming more secular. ... I also believe He is asking us to defend our faith and not be afraid to say that we are Christians.*

Another reason for defending religious freedoms was to defend teaching of the Catholic faith in schools. For example, one participant stated that Catholics needed to:

*[f]ight for religious freedom to proclaim the good news to the children of our schools and colleges. Just because we receive ... funding from government they cannot force us to teach some things which are not in conformity with Catholic teaching.*

## Defending the Right to Life

Another social justice issue raised by a large number of participants was the need to defend the right to life. Similar to the reasons for defending religious freedoms, participants felt the growing



secular culture meant that defending the right to life was critical at this juncture. Participants asked for the Catholic community to:

*not forget about the rights of the unborn, the sanctity of marriage, the right of the elderly and frail to die with dignity and not be threatened by euthanasia. Let's not waste this opportunity. We can't go on as a lukewarm Church!*

In previous chapters, participants called for greater Church leadership on a range of issues such as clergy sexual abuse. Defending the right to life was another area where participants sought greater Church leadership. For example, one response stated that the Church community wants more:

*[m]oral leadership—to counter abortion, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, surrogacy, drug abuse, gambling, prostitution, pornography, [and] sexual abuse of children. Along with the protection of the unborn and the elderly.*

Some participants wanted the Church to have greater support for the adoption of children, as an alternative to abortion and IVF. Other participants believed that defending the “sanctity of marriage” and the “family unit” was critical to maintaining a defence on the right to life. For example, as one participant explained:

*I believe we are being asked to be a voice for marriage and the family as we have always known it and to vigorously*

*maintain every child's birthright of a mother and father and to make this consistently, publicly known.*

### Care for the Family

Many participants felt that a significant social issue the Church needed to consider was “care for the family”. Greater care and support was seen to be particularly important for young families. For example, one participant requested:

*Put more energy into supporting young couples and young families ... a greater focus on families with lower-primary age children could bear great fruit. They are often seeking community, and a framework for raising their children in a rapidly-changing world. Offer them faith in Jesus as a true foundation for a meaningful life!*

A further suggestion for caring for families was to “include them more in the day-to-day life of their parish”. Participants felt this was critical as many young families were important for the ongoing life of the Church. For example, one response was that the Church needed to “[improve] the support to young families, as the future of the Church is in their hands”.

### Putting Gospel Values into Action

In many responses regarding social issues, participants have suggested that solutions to these issues could be found in enacting “Gospel values”. Participants felt that putting Gospel values into action would help the Catholic community act with “compassion”, have “welcoming hearts” and a greater “acceptance” of the many social issues raised. Enacting the values of the Gospel could



also help the Church become a leader in society. For example, one participant stated the Church needed:

*[t]o be a leading light, and practical example of His love and mercy. A people (Church) who have compassion for everyone regardless of position and circumstances.*

A number of participants affirmed that putting Gospel values into action in society had the potential to bring hope to people:

*To be an example to the world via witnessing Gospel values; to be more compassionate with one another; to be a welcoming Church; to respect and accept others as they are; share our talents for the growth of our Church; to not be afraid of what is happening in the Church; pray together as families; tell a story about the strengths in social justice; we are asked to be responsive to criticism of the faults but our response is 'beige' and timid; not to be afraid; accept the past; shame makes us more passionate; be a rock on which the future experience of Church is built.*

*Take care of the weak, poor, rejected and lonely. Pray back to basics in everyday life of living the Gospel. Be humble and forgiving. Be grateful. Listen openly. See Jesus in each other and treat each other with love. Spread the joy ... Work together as different genders respectfully, making decisions together and sharing wisdom.*

## Conclusion

The need for greater emphases on social justice and environmental issues was a central topic of many submissions. Concern for the exclusion of people from the Church persuaded many to believe that there needed to be greater inclusion for all. Participants expressed a need for better inclusion in the Church, community of all sexual preferences and genders, the marginalised, refugees and the poor. Moreover, there was also a push to extend greater care and inclusion for Church community members with disabilities. Participants also advocated for an end to discrimination of the LGBTI community. Justifications for this was that ending discrimination of LGBTI people was enacting the love that Jesus showed to everyone.

A number of participants' submissions focused on renewing the Church's support for human rights issues. This included support for refugees and asylum seekers, the homeless and people enduring famine. Many participants felt that the Church needed to advocate for communities in Australia and overseas to live in peace and harmony. A critical way to improve social justice outcomes for some participants was to reduce the margins between the rich and the poor. Achieving this was possible through the Church community becoming more generous, which could help create a more inclusive and equitable society in Australia. Several participants also urged all members of the Church community to take greater care for the environment. There was a belief that the Church should show leadership in the community on climate change. Moreover, every Catholic should embrace Pope Francis's thinking that environmental care is fundamental to the Gospel, placing the responsibility of climate change on all parish members.

Finally, religious freedom was highlighted as a vital social right for all Christians (and those of other faiths). Participants believe that this was particularly important as Australia grows more secular. An increased defence of the right to life was also highlighted for similar reasons. Participants believed that the Church should show greater leadership on both these issues. There was also a need for better care and support of the family, especially young families. Some participants promoted the need to put Gospel values into action. This could bring greater hope to people along with offering a way to tackle many of the social issues raised in this chapter.

## QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- Welcome and inclusivity for all. Because we are all made in the image of God, how do we ensure that all people feel welcomed and included in the Catholic Church (i.e. – divorced, gay, women)?
- How is the Church able to respond to the diversity of our community to be inclusive of all (First Nations Peoples, environmental protection, gay rights)?
- How do we give a voice to our faith in a time of upheaval and social change?



- We live in a time of massive social change. What does our poor, fractured Church have to offer the world?
- What active role can the Church play in current worldwide crises such as climate change and migration and refugee issues?
- Is the Catholic Church going to continue to block the spirit of many from access to ministry roles within the Church on the basis of differences such as sexual differences or sexual preferences?
- How can we make the Church more inclusive of the divorced and remarried, LGBTI, people with a disability including the mentally ill, those who have been damaged by abuse in the Church—emotional, spiritual, physical and sexual abuse?
- What is the Church doing about climate change?
- How will the Catholic Church resist the seemingly irresistible move from freedom of religion to freedom of worship?
- How will the Church speak into life issues, when the understanding of the dignity of each individual and the integrity of marriage and the family unit is being eroded?
- What formation is available for those in our Catholic schools on life issues such as marriage, death, abortion, euthanasia, gender issues?
- How can the Church go about changing societal values on abortion and other life issues?

## RECOMMENDED READING

The second encyclical by Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* outlines the Church's teaching on ecology, climate change and the responsibility of all people to care for the environment.

Francis. 2015. "On Care For our Common Home, *Laudato Si'*". Vatican website. May 24, 2015. Available at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

In the 2011 and 2016 National Church Life Surveys, Mass attenders were asked a number of questions relating to migrant and refugee issues. Analysis of responses to the three questions, commissioned by the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office, revealed some contrasting attitudes.

Reid, Stephen and Trudy Dantis. 2018. "Mass Attenders' Views on Selected Migrant and Refugee Issues. A report to the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office on Questions Included in the 2016 National Church Life Survey". ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)

## Stories of Faith

*I am the mother of a 19 year old son who is a beautiful being and just happens to be transgender. I truly believe that God created him the way he was meant to be and I have had the pleasure of watching him mature and grow into a beautiful Christian boy. I have had the pleasure of our family being accepted in our Catholic community however I know that this is very much up to the priest in our church. A different priest can mean a very different outcome and I worry for him in our Church in the future. I believe in marriage equality for all LGBT Christians and I cannot see Jesus excluding these beautiful souls who were created in this way. I would like to see more women in roles of authority within the Church. A woman called to the priesthood by God should be able to serve out her calling. We are missing out on a huge wealth of talent by excluding them. I hope that our Church can move forward with positivity, inclusion and love and leave behind the judgement and small mindedness of our past. Many of those in my age group who came from faithful Catholic families have now left the Church or turn up only at weddings and funerals. It will I believe take a major shift in our Church with a move back to basics in order to bring them back. There is a lot of lost faith in the Church itself that has caused so many to move away.*

*"A different priest can mean a very different outcome and I worry for him in our Church in the future."*

10

## OUTREACH

Continuing to look outside ourselves, this chapter moves from social justice topics to the subject of outreach. A large number of participants felt that it was important to have a greater connection with and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Church community. Many responses also identified the desire to reach out to all the baptised and be more welcoming, and to encourage non-Church-going, baptised Catholics to return to greater practice of their faith. There was a call to connect with same-sex-attracted persons and listen to them and include them. Participants also raised the issue that there needed to be outreach to the wider community. Finally, there were a large number of responses encouraging greater youth outreach, so as to include, engage with and listen to them.

### Greater Connection with and Inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

An important aspect of outreach raised by participants was the call for the Church in Australia to pursue greater connection with and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Around this theme, some key words participants used to elucidate their views were “recognition”, “respect”, “involvement”, “support”, “dignity”, “nurture” and “understanding”.

Numerous participants lamented not having a First Nations presence in the Church as a whole and in their parishes, and called for greater involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in all aspects of Church life, including “all aspects of the Plenary Council” processes.

*What is sadly lacking is Aboriginal people coming back to the Catholic Church, because of its significance in the story of the Aboriginal people who have a strong mission history of connection.*

*Respect the role of Aboriginal people in all aspects of society, be open to them, learn from them and joyfully receive their contribution to all aspects of the Church.*

Many submissions focused on the need for the Church’s acknowledgement, recognition of and reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in order to move forward.

*To acknowledge the First Peoples of our Nations. To seek and strive for equality to be witnesses of Christ—to be Christ’s hands, feet and presence in the world.*

*... a greater appreciation and celebration of our Indigenous people and heritage.*

*Take Aboriginal spirituality seriously. Humbly learn what they have to teach.*

*Every time we meet as a community, name the Indigenous country on which we stand, acknowledging their history, their elders and what they have achieved. Mention and*

*pray for them at Mass in the Prayers of the Faithful, placing them first out of respect for the First Peoples of this land and surely more need for respect and honouring their dignity.*

A number of participants suggested that the Church needs to do more in the way it reaches out to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

*In Australia, we still have a big divide between Indigenous brothers and the rest of us. The Church needs to take a leading role in building reconciliation by adopting positive gestures that enhance and challenge this overdue reconciliation.*

Participants asked for better acknowledgement of First Nations rituals and celebrations and for certain elements to be included in the Church.

*Ensure that the Aboriginal stories, ritual and ceremonies are incorporated into our Catholic Church.*



A few participants recommended that questions around how the Church can better reach out to our First Nations groups should be addressed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics themselves.

## Outreach to all the Baptised

There was a call from many participants to seek out and welcome back those baptised Catholics disconnected in some way from the Church.

*To try to encourage those not practising to come back or if those who are discouraged to come back but with encouragement and example.*

*Discern how to engage and bring to active faith the many people who attend Mass at Easter and Christmas or for Baptisms but not otherwise.*

*The Church in Australia needs to reach out to all Catholics, not just those who are faithful in practising their faith.*

A smaller number of participants wanted more outreach to various “fringe” groups of Catholics who may feel unwelcome.

*Reach out to all Catholics, including those in irregular marriages and those struggling with sexual identity, in a non-judgemental way.*

*I believe our Church needs to welcome back disenfranchised Catholics and to encourage active participation by stepping back from the rules that exclude them.*

Some participants appealed for more encouragement of those not connected to return to

the life of the Church, and a few made suggestions of ways to enact such encouragement.

*As our mission in Australia, why don't we have a prayer service for disconnected Catholics one day a month where all matters are on the table and open to discussion?*

## Outreach to Same-Sex-Attracted Persons

Overall, a substantial number of submissions received were on the theme of same-sex-attracted persons. Within such submissions, many participants specifically called for outreach to same-sex-attracted persons. Most of those participants wanted to see a more inclusive Church that welcomed all, regardless of sexuality.

*Focus on developing a more inclusive Church. God's love is inclusive. The Church has spent too much time excluding rather than including.*

*Following the same-sex marriage debate, how can we reach out to members of the LGBTI+ community who are practising Catholics ... welcoming them back to a supportive Church?*

For a number of participants, outreach to same-sex-attracted persons was linked to listening respectfully to their views and to their stories.

*It is time to listen to the stories of LGBTI Catholics with respect, sensitivity and compassion. LGBTI people are more than their sexuality and I am confident God sees the whole person. The Church is also invited to do the same.*

## Outreach to the Wider Community

There was a strong appeal from many participants for greater outreach to the wider community and non-Catholics not involved in the local church, calling for communities to have a “Christ-like” inclusivity which welcomes all, without judgement.

*We need to return to the welcoming community that Jesus proclaimed—one that does not judge, one that does not condemn, one that does not say to 'outsiders' that they are not worthy of belonging and participating, one that recognises sinfulness exists in us all, and that we are called to step out and engage with the world, encouraging all to be as Christ-like as possible, by using our actions and not our words to represent Christ.*

*As a Church we need to be open to see God at work in the world, and help those who do not know or have any interest in God to recognise the reality of God's presence. As a Church we need to be welcoming of all people and encourage others to do the same, not being judgemental.*

For many participants, outreach to the wider community meant embracing an external focus rather than being an “inward-looking” Church.

*To become a Church of humility and service that is outward-looking to the communities in which they exist. We need to reclaim our missionary focus and go out of our comfort zones to meet people where they are—the poor, the unchurched, those injured by the Church, those who hate the Church . . . We have become an inward-looking Church and we are called to look outwards to those in need, to those on the peripheries, to those who need God most.*

One participant tried to imagine a Church where all Catholics reached out to the wider community:

*I believe God is asking the Church to be less inward-facing and more outward-facing. I believe that God is asking each of us to look after the One. This refers to the story of Jesus the Good Shepherd who leaves the 99 and goes in search for the One who is lost. Now I know that some Catholics are already involved with refugees, the poor, the homeless, the sick etc. But many people in the Church just go to Mass on Sunday for one hour and that is the extent of their involvement. Just imagine what our world could look like if every Catholic took seriously the call to reach out to others that is a repeated theme in the Bible, expressed in different ways*

Several participants highlighted the ongoing positive contribution of the Church to outreach via service provision in the local community, and called for it to continue.

*Build our community—providing services, food, care, companionship to disadvantaged members of our community and those not yet in our community such as refugees in offshore detention.*

*Do individual parishes/all parishes need to establish a project which will help them re-connect with the community? For example, local soup kitchen on a weekly basis i.e. Saturday morning.*

A major sub-theme within this theme of outreach to the wider community, mentioned by numerous participants, was the Church's role in providing counselling services.

Providing marriage and family counselling and support was highlighted by a number of participants



as ways of reaching out to the wider community.

*Protect and strengthen the family through support for married couples, parenting courses, homilies, marriage preparation courses for people getting married.*

*There should be more counselling, mediation, etc. Why is marriage break-up so rampant? How can we 'market' the support the Church can give individuals in their time of need?*

A few participants suggested other types of practical activities, such as cooking and sewing lessons, workshops for gardeners, and so on.

*As a church I believe we need to: become more outreaching and welcoming—open our doors or go out into the community, get involved in local community, have more modern liturgical music, welcome & provide activities for families, experiment with our delivery to engage a younger audience—talks, social media, short courses, social events, networking with existing services in the community. 'Being Church' is not just about liturgy.*

## Outreach to Youth

The final theme within outreach was reaching out to youth. For most participants who touched on this theme, there was recognition that reaching out to young people in a relevant way was an important part of being community.

*Young people need a Church with priests and laity able to relate to their needs, not just within the Mass but also within their lives and activities.*

A few participants specifically linked reaching out to youth with finding ways to connect to Christ's message in a manner that is relevant to contemporary young people. For some, this was about ensuring rituals, traditions and ceremonies in the Church reflected where young people are and where they are going in the future.

*God is asking us to find ways to reach out to the younger generations and make changes, where necessary and possible, to give them a reason to reconnect with God, Jesus and the Church. Teachers and chaplains should be very much involved. After all, our younger generations have been taught to be rational, critical thinkers and no longer believe what they are told to believe as we did.*

For many participants, outreach to youth was quite complex, and some asked the question of how to address the issue.

*The biggest problem in the Catholic Church today is the high number of children who fail to make the transition to the mission and witness of the Church as adults. We must respond to this as a matter of singular urgency ... we must not think that the solution is easy. It's not. Rather it is multifaceted and complex.*

*How to bring the youth to Church/or back to Church. There are too many distractions out there and the Church needs to be relevant to today's youth. I concede that all these 'thee and thou' are just about boring and does nothing to thinking youth.*

Numerous participants stressed the need to ask young people how to connect and engage more fully with them, those within and outside of the Church community.

*We may need to focus less on numbers at Mass and more on ... why young people are not motivated to participate, on how we the Church (laity & clergy) can be open to listen to young people and allow them to voice their questions without contradiction / judgement and how we can help them cope with the social pressures that prevent them from understanding and practising their faith. [We need] to reach out hospitably and try to understand the spirituality of younger people who do not necessarily join the community at the Sunday assembly.*

A number of young people provided input on this sub-theme, including one aged in the mid-20s:

*As a young person I've often felt frustrated by what seems to be an assumption that social events and superficial worship are what young people are looking for in youth groups. I would love to have access to something richer for me and my friends. [There should be] greater engagement with the arts and social justice. Both of these are great avenues for reaching people who might not come to a church, but who care about truth and beauty.*

## Conclusion

In general, the call for more outreach covered various groups of people in the local and wider community. There was a strong sense of a need for much greater connection with, and recognition and inclusion of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into local parishes and into the Catholic community as a whole. Participants appealed for greater welcome and for the encouragement of all baptised to return to the life of the Church. A similar inclusivity of same-sex-attracted persons was needed, according to numerous participants. Other participants sought outreach to those in the wider community, with a call to serve and love all by having an external focus, rather than an inward-looking focus. Part of this wider community outreach, according to some, could be through the continued offering of practical courses and counselling services. Reaching out to, engaging with and including youth was another important aspect of outreach.





## QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- How do we get younger people to volunteer in the parish?
- How do we ... focus on parish and Church renewal so that parish communities are welcoming in their listening, outreach, liturgical practice, preaching and creative new ways of being a Church community?
- How can we as Church be connected to the realities and lives of ordinary people and reflect this in accessible and meaningful liturgical life?
- How can we set up structures to strengthen the parish community?
- How can we present the Church so that the secular community will seek advice from us, rather than reject us as being out of touch?
- How can more Aboriginal [and Torres Strait Islander] peoples be involved in parish and diocesan meetings?
- How can the Catholic Church better reach out to its members who are isolated due to living remotely?

## RECOMMENDED READING

This second topic report, from the Building Stronger Parishes research project, explores parish missionary, evangelising and outreach activities. Included within the findings are the various ways in which parishes reach out to people with special needs, such as the sick, elderly or disabled, and the relevant services provided by parish groups.

*Dantis, Trudy. 2015. "Building Stronger Parishes: Project Topic Report 2: Mission, Outreach and Evangelisation". ACBC Pastoral Research Office. Available to purchase at [www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Building-Stronger-Parishes-Report-2-Mission-Outreach-and-Evangelisation/p/57049349/category=4727032](http://www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Building-Stronger-Parishes-Report-2-Mission-Outreach-and-Evangelisation/p/57049349/category=4727032)*

## Stories of Faith

*When I was 22, I attended a talk on World Youth Day 2011 at a women's charity. After this talk I started to befriend local girls in the area and became active in my faith such as attending weekly meditations with a priest of Opus Dei, weekly Confession, monthly recollections and a yearly retreat. There were women who lived in the centre of Opus Dei that were instrumental in my faith to encourage me to frequent the sacraments such as daily Mass, weekly Confession and to be an instrument of Christ in the middle of the world by sanctifying the ordinary work that we do each day. It was at that women's charity that I learned to serve others by working for God and to also value doctrine and my Catholic faith. Without the help of these centres of Opus Dei, I don't know where I would be today. I'm now 29 years old, engaged to be married in May 2019 and I'm preparing for a vocation that I have been able to pray and prepare for with formation through my involvement with spiritual activities as a young professional ... For about seven years, I was volunteering closely with other young professional women, in another state, to promote character development, professional growth and growth in virtue. Young girls of the state I volunteered in need a place like the women's charity I attended to ensure that they are growing to be women of leadership, integrity and virtue. I am passionate about young females in this area to also grow in their faith, especially through quality formation and doctrine. The priests of Opus Dei have been instrumental in my formation and we need to support these priests to assist with reaching more young people. I am passionate to help more centres of Opus Dei grow in Australia and New Zealand as it has helped shape the person I am today. My love for God has grown and I know how much I have been influenced by those around me on this journey.*

*"My love for God has grown and I know how much I have been influenced by those around me on this journey."*



# EVANGELISATION

Closely aligned with the topic of outreach is that of evangelisation. Participants felt passionately that there should be a sharing of the faith with others and that evangelisation needed to focus on the family, both within individual families and towards that specific demographic. A number of responses also suggested reaching out to other Christian communities. There were also calls for a greater focus on mission and to encourage people to become missionary disciples of the Church. Finally, issues were raised relating to encouraging vocations, the need for greater evangelisation in Australian society, increased evangelising of school students and a focus on public prayers and peaceful processions.

## Sharing the Faith with Others

A key understanding of evangelisation noted by participants was the need to share the faith with others with sincerity, humility and love.

*To share our faith with others with humility, charity and courage so that others can come to know and love Jesus.*

A number of participants called for evangelisation to be more courageous, with a few noting the urgency of such endeavour.

*At this time, I believe that God is asking Australia for a new wave of evangelisation, something that I believe has never been a part of our country's history. We are traditionally very private people when it comes to matters of religion, however, the Gospel calls us to spread the good news. I believe that if we as Catholics do not take this call to evangelisation seriously, the rates of religiosity, church attendance and Christian living will continue to fall and parishes will continue to merge and close due to lack of attendance and priests.*

For some, evangelisation was about “catechising people” about the Church’s teachings and ensuring that such efforts were consistent with the “true Magisterium of the Church”. For other participants, evangelisation was simply about sharing the Gospel and the good news of Christ:

*We are being asked to return to the pure job of preaching the Gospel.*

A number of participants noted that Catholics needed to be taught “how to share their faith in Jesus”, while for others, “presenting God as the centre of our lives” was more than just words but needed to be lived out by one’s actions every day.

## Focus on Ecumenism

Ecumenism was seen as an important aspect of evangelisation for many participants.

*I believe God earnestly desires that his Church becomes more unified with all the Christian denominations. As Jesus prayed before he left this earth: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one”. - John 17:20*

There were many suggestions from participants around building a sense of “oneness” and of unity among the Christian churches. Numerous ideas included interdenominational community events, intentional times for prayer for unity between Christian groups and/or sharing buildings with other groups which do not have their own, particularly those in rural areas.

Similarly, a number of participants noted the value in acknowledging shared beliefs between the various Christian denominations and the need to “stand together” in solidarity, whilst also retaining “our own uniqueness and identity”.



*... encourage ecumenism by developing, in conjunction with other willing Christian churches, a list of shared beliefs that can be promulgated with confidence to the whole community.*

In addition to working with other Christians, working with and understanding people of other faiths was important for some participants. A small number also called for a continued working together with those people who held no belief.

### Focus on Mission, Being Missionary Disciples

Many participants believed that God wanted the Church to be more focused on mission and missionary discipleship.

*We are asked to be missionary disciples, to do God's mission as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus.*

A few participants suggested that parishes and the whole Church needed to be encouraged to “move from maintenance to mission”.

*That the Church intentionally move from maintenance mode ... to a prayerfully discerned 'mission mode' which should always be our primary focus.*

A number of participants called for a reimagining of that mission at the local parish level:

*To rediscover the beauty and power of the local Church. To redefine parish as communities of missionary disciples who are committed to forming places of belonging and growth for people to discover faith in Jesus and grow as disciples. To be prepared to relearn what it means to be*

*missionary. To put introducing people to Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit as our primary task.*

One participant captured the essence of the submissions of numerous others in calling for an alternative perspective of the Church's vision:

*I believe that at this time God is calling us to look forward not from a problem-solving perspective but from a kingdom-building one. ... How would our world look if each member of our congregations left the doors of the Church equipped to be a missionary disciple in their homes and workplaces. We need to have a vision for the Kingdom that goes beyond our four walls into government, education, health, entertainment, business and every area of our daily life. We need to re-engage with our pastoral works and social justice works with Jesus at the heart of all we do. Each time someone steps into a church, there should be an opportunity for encounter with Christ and transformational worship.*

### Evangelisation in and of the Family

A specific sub-theme within evangelisation was the need for evangelisation of the family.

For some participants, the priority of evangelising families revolved around the importance of having families more active in local parishes. For others, a greater effort in, and encouragement of, evangelisation of families was needed, focused on the home. Activities such as prayer, devotion to the Rosary or Confession needed to be a priority to ensure “a stable family environment” was being fostered within Catholic families.

Numerous participants identified that there was a real lack of resources, such as programs and ministries, to support families in their faith education.

*There is little information available to families about how they could foster vocations within their families. I have found an excellent resource on the website of the USCCB called ABCs of Fostering Vocations, and believe that it would be wonderful if Australian bishops adopted that resource.*

There was a sense among some participants that Catholic families were “under attack” from the influences of Australian society. Ensuring families were being supported to pass on their own faith was understood as a way to combat such negative influences.

*Parents are disconnected from Church and impacted by the influence of secularism and consumerism, so the challenge is how to evangelise in a secular consumerist culture.*

*... family life is under attack from: Secular society / Technological Age / Relationship difficulties / Economic structures / hardships. What are the answers? How should the Catholic faith be passed on? Focus on parent responsibilities and show what they should be doing.*

A number of participants noted the transmission of faith within and through the family needed to be supported within a communal setting, such as the local parish.

*God is asking us to renew the domestic Church, which is the family. A key element to this is the transmission of faith to children and the role of the faith community as a*

*support to couples. God is asking us to take seriously the call to pass on the faith for the future generations. This requires a serious faith formation of parents, not as a series of lectures, but a continual unfolding of baptismal grace. Perhaps the parish structure, as we have known it in the past, is changing to a more communal and familial model. And herein lies the call to nourish faith at a family, or domestic level.*

### Encouraging Vocations

Another lesser focus that participants raised within the evangelisation theme was calling for more encouragement and support of vocations. The majority of these focused on the need for more priestly and religious vocations.

*There should ... be a greater emphasis on the promotion of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, on faith development and opportunities to be called to a deeper living of our spirituality.*

A number of participants suggested that better formation and involvement of young people in the Church “may bring in” more vocations. Some noted that “too many good men” had left the priesthood and a few suggested that some men had been “rejected” for the priesthood without adequate reason.

Several participants called for new ways of ministering, in response to the “collapse” in the number of men called to the priesthood. A small number lamented the absence of encouragement for vocations to religious life.



## Church as a Guide for Australian Society

Another sub-theme that a small number of participants raised within the broader evangelisation theme focused on the role of the Church as a guide for the wider Australian society.

*A proactive Church that walks alongside all Australians in the great national issues of our time and plays an active role in advocacy in accordance with Catholic social teaching.*

For some participants, the Church's role was particularly important in bringing God's Word to what has become a secular and pluralist society.

*God is asking us to be in dialogue about our faith. He is asking us to share the Good News of Jesus in a world that does not always want to hear it. A world that has become selfish and materially-driven. Our job as evangelists is harder than ever because we are turning into a society that is more and more 'God-less'—not reliant or believing in God. I think He would want us to be talking about our faith and standing up for it.*

Another aspect of this "Church as guide" role, according to some participants, included engagement of Catholics in political activity.

*Catholic laity must engage in Catholic political action ... A body must be established to pursue prioritised and coordinated Catholic political action across Australia.*

A few participants called for the Church to have a greater public witness in Australian society by being involved in "more peaceful public processions" and other public displays of Catholic spirituality, such as public Marian processions, Rosaries and prayers.

## Focus on the New Evangelisation

According to some participants, God is asking the Church to step away from "being complacent and comfortable" and to focus on re-evangelisation and attracting "lapsed" Catholics to return to the Church.

*We need to re-evangelise those Catholics that are on the fringe of their faith and show them the truth of the word God and Jesus Christ gave us.*

A few participants specifically called for a re-evangelisation of school students, suggesting that many Catholics "disappear" after they have completed their secondary schooling. Nearly all of those who called for a re-evangelisation of young people linked it to bringing "more people to and back to the Church".

## Conclusion

In general, participants who suggested that God was for asking the Church in Australia to undertake evangelisation identified the need for Catholics to share their faith with others in a humble and loving way. Incorporated within the need to evangelise was the call to work ecumenically with other Christian traditions and to show a shared sense of unity and solidarity. For many participants the Church needed to re-orient its focus towards mission, with "the people" being missionary disciples investing in kingdom building rather than maintenance.

Some participants identified that evangelisation of the family was important, which needed to be resourced and supported to ensure the faith was being passed on through generations and not influenced by negative societal factors. There was also a sense among some participants that there needed to be a greater focus on encouraging people to pursue priestly and religious vocations.

The Church in Australia, according to a small number of participants, should have a significant role to play as guide for the wider society. For some this involved more political engagement and acts of public witness to be a positive influence in secular society. Additionally there was a call for a re-evangelisation of those Catholics who had "lapsed" or ceased involvement, and particularly a focus on school students.

## QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- How can we focus more on families, welcoming them and involving them? They are the Church of tomorrow.
- Evangelisation: Who is evangelising the evangelisers?
- How can the Church support the faith of its schools and ... teachers?



- Who is evangelising the parents when they don't attend Mass and their only teachers are the anti-Catholic media and the often limited faith teaching of their children?
- How do we offer hope to the Catholic people of Australia?
- How do we recognise young people and couples who have a strong faith and encourage them to be able to pass it on to others and provide support networks for them to meet like-minded people?
- Would it be possible to supply evangelisation teams (not only to youth) to become missionaries within Australia? Can every diocese have such teams?
- Can people wanting to evangelise be supported spiritually and materially while they train and while they go out to teach others? Can we use the example of other faiths in missioning parishioners?

## RECOMMENDED READING

This second topic report, from the Building Stronger Parishes research project, explores parish missionary, evangelising and outreach activities. Within the report, the relevance of mission in parish life, the mission and evangelisation aspects of parishes, and the range of activities within the local community are explored.

*Dantis, Trudy. 2015. "Building Stronger Parishes: Project Topic Report 2: Mission, Outreach and Evangelisation". ACBC Pastoral Research Office. Available to purchase at [www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Building-Stronger-Parishes-Report-2-Mission-Outreach-and-Evangelisation/p/57049349/category=4727032](http://www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Building-Stronger-Parishes-Report-2-Mission-Outreach-and-Evangelisation/p/57049349/category=4727032)*

Between 2015 and 2017, a research study investigated recent vocations to religious life in Australia. The purpose of the project was to help identify successful practices for promoting vocations to religious life and to understand the factors which assist in the retention of new members. This report provides a detailed overview of the findings.

*Dixon, Robert, Ruth Webber, Stephen Reid, Richard Rymarz, Julie Martin and Noel Connolly. 2018. "Understanding Religious Vocation in Australia Today. A Report of a Study of Vocations to Religious Life 2000-2015 for Catholic Vocations Ministry Australia". ACBC Pastoral Research Office. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)*

This book explores various parish models in order to rethink the ways Catholic parishes can embrace their mission of evangelisation.

*Mallon, James. 2014. "Divine Renovation: Bringing Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission". Twenty-Third Publication.*

## Stories of Faith

*When I was in year 11, I went the Immaculate Mission School for the first time. It was a 14-day retreat run by the Sisters of the Immaculate and we had daily holy hours, prayed the Rosary, listened to many talks, went street evangelising and door knocking, observed times of silence and still managed to play games and do fun activities as well. As a shy person, I found it challenging to talk to others and especially when I went door knocking. But everyone was so welcoming and charitable that upon reflection, I realised I'd found a pocket of hope in a world of despair. It changed my life because although I knew God loved me intellectually having been taught this at school, at the retreat, I truly felt His love in my heart. It was the love and charity everyone had for each other and for me that touched me and helped me to see and tangibly feel God's love for me.*

*"...I realised I'd found a pocket of hope in a world of despair."*

12

## MORE LISTENING

In order to be more effective members of the Church, a number of responses expressed the view that more listening was desirable. Greater listening was the key message of the whole Plenary Council process. Participants spoke about listening in a number of contexts. Firstly, there was a call for all members of the Catholic community to listen to one another more. Next, participants expressed the need for all to listen more to the Holy Spirit. Finally, there were requests for the Church hierarchy to better listen to the laity.

### Listening to One Another More

A large number of participants mentioned that God was asking them to listen to one another more. This included listening to one another within the parish community. As one participant explained: “I feel God is calling us to listen to each other and work together”. Further examples of listening to one another included listening to “your neighbour” and “the wider Australian community”. For example, as this participant wrote:

*God is asking us to listen to all baptised, Catholics or other traditions, practising or not.*

### Listening to the Holy Spirit

The second aspect of the “more listening” topic that many participants highlighted was a greater need to listen to the Holy Spirit. This was particularly in relation to three distinct groups: the whole Church community, the laity and the Church hierarchy. For example, one participant stated:

*Listen to the Holy Spirit rather than just follow the rules [or] guidance which have got us in our current mess.*

Another participant spoke of the need for the whole Church community to listen to the Holy Spirit as follows:

*To be more open and responsive to the differing ways that the Spirit is working through the many and varied Catholic people, schools and agencies, as well as in arenas that are not ‘church’ or ‘parish’.*

In addition, participants felt that the Holy Spirit should be listened to more to guide the organisation of the Church, be it the laity or clergy:

*I think He [God] is telling us, ‘You can do nothing without Me’. I think He is asking us to let Him be in control by seeking and*

*allowing the Holy Spirit to move in power through the charisms, to find ways for this to be a normal part of every prayer (liturgical and otherwise), every meeting, every planning session, every staffing decision, every ministry (lay and clerical).*



### Listening to the Laity

Many participants voiced a need for the Church hierarchy to listen more to the lay people in Australia. A justification for this often referred back to the teachings of Jesus. For example, one participant stated:

*I think God is calling us, especially the leadership, to listen to what the laity are saying; to listen to our hearts and to recall Jesus's words about laws being made for man and not man being made for law. The bishops need to listen to their hearts and to their people.*

A greater effort of the Church hierarchy to listen to the laity was also connected to the Church becoming more compassionate and less doctrine-driven. These sentiments were expressed in this response:

*He [God] is begging us to shake up the Church, to listen to the people, discard dangerous clerical power, emphasise service of each other ... Listen to young people as well as older and experienced people (lots of untapped wisdom among the People of God). Less emphasis on doctrine and more emphasis on compassion.*

### Conclusion

This chapter analysed responses related to different aspects of listening by the Church community. Some participants urged each and every Catholic to listen to each other more. Additionally, participants highlighted the need for greater listening to the wider Australian community. For many participants, listening to the Holy Spirit was also vitally important. In particular, participants believed that the Church hierarchy needed to listen more to the Holy Spirit to guide their day-to-day actions in leading the Church. Participants also advocated for greater listening to the Holy Spirit by the whole Church community including the laity and Catholic organisations such as schools and Church agencies. Finally, greater listening to the laity, especially by the Church hierarchy, was seen to be of critical importance. Participants felt that through an active effort of greater listening to the laity, the Church could become more compassionate and less doctrine-driven.



## QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- Are you going to address the power structures which prevent the Church from listening to its congregations?
- Are you willing to put aside traditions (this is the way we have always done things) and dedicate yourselves to prayer to hear from and listen to the quiet still leading of the Holy Spirit—what God has for the next chapter of the Catholic Church in Australia?
- How do we create viable communities within the parish, where dialogue and listening happens all the time, where people know each other, grow in faith and love and hope and are able to forgive?
- How can we be a genuine listening Church—a more discerning Church?
- How can we work to be more welcoming, inclusive, open, kind, loving, forgiving, compassionate, listening, and so build a “home/community” Church for all, not just an institutional one?
- How do we focus on parish and Church renewal so that parish communities are welcoming in their listening outreach, liturgical practice, preaching and creative new ways of being a Church community?
- What practical steps can our Catholic institutions (parishes, dioceses, schools, universities) take to foster the virtues of humility, listening and obedience in their communities?
- How can we ignite passion, compassion and listening, loving hearts without asking for the fire of the Holy Spirit to be renewed in our Australian Church?

## RECOMMENDED READING

This short article responds to a frequent question about the Plenary Council and its process: Will the bishops of Australia really listen and respond with change?

Connolly, Noel. 2018. “Will They Listen? Will anything Change?” Plenary Council. Available at [www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)

## Stories of Faith

*I volunteer my spare time to be a youth leader at the parish. My group aims to bring together young adults in fellowship through social activities, scripture learning, praise and worship and social justice activities. Our group has brought a togetherness amongst like-minded people. I was at a festival and I came across an old friend who wasn't Catholic. She was interested in the faith and I invited her to tag along with me. I then introduced her to members of my group as well as the seminarians. By God's grace, she continued hanging around our group and is now attending RCIA [Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults] sessions. I'm her sponsor and I pray she makes it all the way to becoming a Catholic. Through a welcoming and vibrant community, Christ has another follower. This experience has been a blessing from God. Thank you for your time and for considering my perspective.*

*“Thank you for your time and for considering my perspective.”*



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YOUTH  
MINISTRY

Youth ministry and related themes were identified as a particularly important topic in the responses. The participants highlighted a need for better training and support for youth leaders. A number also identified the need for better youth faith formation and to provide more youth facilities. There were calls for the re-establishing of old youth programs and the creation of new ones. Finally, participants indicated that there needed to be a level of funding and resourcing from the Church to help support these youth initiatives.

### Better Training and Support for Youth Leaders

A key element of participants' views relating to youth ministry was the desire to see more comprehensive training for youth leaders along with the provision of support for them in their roles. According to the participants, more formal training, conducted by people with expertise in youth ministry, was needed to overcome the risk of the "blind leading the blind". Suggestions such as having a youth ministry base for training or training youth leaders in youth offices were proposed.

*Youth leaders need to be trained by people who know about youth ministry – NOT by the parish priest!!*

In addition to training, participants noted that youth ministry needs intentional support and funding in order to ensure stronger youth groups. Investment in youth leaders financially by providing a paid role, either part-time or full-time, and by supporting them to study theology or catechetics would assist in building youth ministry.

*God is calling our parish to have a full-time youth coordinator to focus on encouraging and forming the youth just like occurred in the Catholic Youth Association previously.*

### Better Youth Faith Formation

A number of participants noted specifically that formation of young people needed greater attention. As an example, one participant mentioned the need for creative resourcing in order to assist young people with their faith development:

*We need to invest in creating resources that speak to a new generation, resources that are relevant. We should look at what other Christian churches are doing who are successfully engaging young people and use their ideas. We need to create resources that are accessible through social media platforms and other online resources that can answer the questions of young people, build their faith.*

Many participants linked the formation of youth to Mass involvement. One participant noted the importance of youth groups as forums to lead young people to attendance at Mass.

*We need to support youth attending youth groups so they can develop these relationships with youth leaders, and then be invited to Mass and be supported in their understanding of the Mass and how God works in us on our journeys in different ways.*

Some participants identified a need to promote certain rituals to improve formation opportunities for young people.

*Practise Holy Hour before Holy Mass. Maybe even with the Rosary. Make Adoration (30 min to 1 hour) an essential part of youth group programs.*

On the other hand, some other participants noted the importance of youth formation "outside the Mass". Allowing space for socialisation with other Catholic young people was one such idea.

*Youth should have an outlet where they can receive formation and socialise amongst other Catholic youth in the parish.*

Forming young people by understanding, appreciating and inviting them to utilise their gifts was a concern for a number of participants.

*Not everyone fits into pre-established groups. It is important that pastors consider the uniqueness of every member of the Church. Some of them will not find their place in the so-called 'active roles' ... Some young people feel uneasy because they don't enjoy the activities organised by the parish group or the music they play or some kind of interaction that they consider 'weird'. But they should never feel excluded from the Church for that reason. They need a personalised attention.*

## Providing More Youth Facilities

Along with training, formation and support, some participants suggested the provision of more youth facilities was required. Finding funding to create more local-level youth clubs or youth groups were ideas put forward:

*More funding towards youth ministry at local levels and not always distributed to large-scale events.*

*Provide facilities such as youth clubs for the young people to encourage them to grow in the Faith and continue their commitment to the sacraments as they move through High School and into adult life.*

One participant reminisced about the positive link between youth groups and Church involvement.

*Having a youth group as a youngster experiencing live music was a form of prayer and attracted you to the Church.*

## Establishing More Youth Programs

For a number of participants, the importance of creating places or developing programs for young people was paramount to building up youth ministry successfully in the Church in the various dioceses across Australia.

*Provide opportunities for young people in rural settings to have access to formation and fellowship with like-minded people.*

For some participants, youth ministry should be developed by revisiting 'old' programs, such as the Young Christian Students, the Catholic Youth Organisation or Antioch.

*More concentration on social/spiritual resources for our youth—similar to the old CYO groups in the past.*

*In past years—up to about 1980—at school there was the Young [Christian Students] (YCS) and then after school one would join the CYO (Catholic Youth Organisation) ... Now there is nothing!*

*Re-visitation of the movements of some years ago that worked well at that time such as Cursillo and the Antioch Youth Movement.*

For other participants, there is a need to establish new youth programs that are relevant to contemporary Catholic young people. Such programs would appeal to “mainstream” youth, who may not be interested in engaging in more

“traditional ways” but may be interested in engaging with other Catholics through practical expressions of faith, such as through local social justice activities.

Similarly, one small group of participants prioritised the need to set up youth groups in all parishes:

*... not segregated youth groups in each parish or lost within large groups, but*

*connected in all parishes at each parish level. Currently there are many parishes that do not have a youth group; these youth activities need to be well-marketed throughout the diocese.*

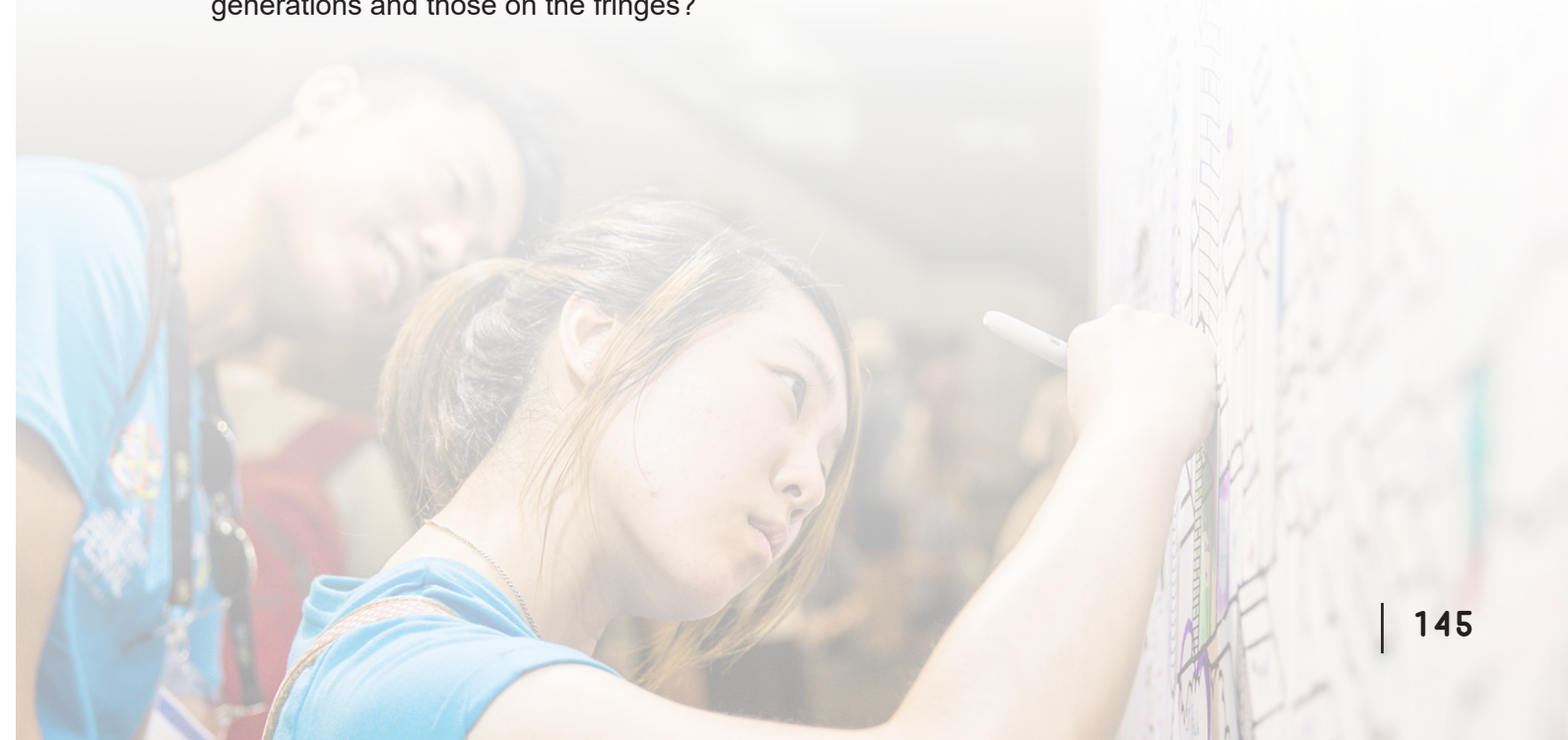
## Conclusion

Generally, participants who called for better youth ministry programs and resources specifically wanted to see more formal training and well-funded, intentional support for youth leaders. They called for greater access to, and better, youth formation, as well as the provision of more youth facilities through proper funding and resourcing. There were some contrasting perspectives, with some participants calling for the re-establishment of past youth program models, while others called for creativity and new ideas. There was relative accord among participants about the need for youth ministry to be relevant and well-funded.

## QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- Students may be knowledgeable about their faith and may be very prayerful in private, but there is not the visible evidence of students celebrating the Eucharist in community?
- How will traditional Church liturgy be adapted to societal changes to reach more effectively younger generations and those on the fringes?





- Cities seem to have more access to youth programs—what is being done to increase youth involvement in rural parishes?
- Why are we losing so many youth from the Church?
- How are parishes being helped to address youth groups' needs?
- Is there more opportunity for youth engagement beyond youth groups?
- The Australian Church should make the readings more modern in context so that they are more relatable to young people today. How will the Church get more youth involved?
- What is the Church doing to encourage the participation of young people (including anyone under about 40 years of age) in its active membership?
- What is it that young people today are seeking in their spiritual lives? How do they envisage spiritual fulfilment? What attracts them to other churches, including other Christian denominations, rather than the Catholic Church of their upbringing?

## RECOMMENDED READING

This report provides the findings of a 2017 survey, to which more than 15,000 young people responded, which sought to study the interactions between young people, the Church and society, and to examine young people's religious practices and Church involvement, and to explore how the Church might better engage with young people. Chapters 3 and 4 provide a narrative on youth ministry groups, organisations and events, and successful youth gatherings within and outside the Church.

*Dantis, Trudy and Stephen Reid. 2017. "Called to Fullness of Life and Love: Youth Survey 2017". ACBC Pastoral Research Office. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)*

Analysing responses of three questions commissioned by the ACBC Office for Youth in the 2016 National Church Life Survey, this report explores attenders' views on their future involvement in the Catholic Church, what they value about being Catholic and who have been the strongest supporters in their faith journey.

*Reid, Stephen and Trudy Dantis. 2018. "Mass Attenders' Faith and Future Involvement in the Catholic Church. A Report to the Office for Youth on Questions Included in the 2016 National Church Life Survey". ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)*

## Stories of Faith

*I remember when I was 21, attending Mass every Sunday but not seeing any other young adults in the parish. My faith was important to me and I made an effort to learn more through books and online resources. It was the invitation of the parish priest to help start a youth group in preparation for WYD [World Youth Day] 2008 that kick started a community of high school students. Our parish priest was supportive with his time and suggestion of activities. Without his initiative, many in the group will probably have stopped practising their faith. The majority in the group are still practising their faith, but their knowledge of the faith is not strong. Because of this lack of doctrinal formation, it is hard for them to pass on any of their faith knowledge, whether to friends, colleagues or even their own children.*

*"Without his initiative, many in the group will probably have stopped practising their faith."*

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## CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Associated with the topic of youth ministry were various comments addressing the topic of Catholic education in schools. Participant responses conveyed a desire for better teachers in Catholic schools, addressing concerns such as teachers who are not Catholic or not practising the faith, as well as a need for better faith formation for teachers. A number also identified the need to promote greater faith formation for parents, as well as placing more chaplains and youth ministers in schools. There were calls for the Church to offer greater support to Catholic students in Catholic schools. Finally, participants felt that there should be more authentic Catholic faith teaching offered in Catholic schools.

### Better Teachers in Catholic Schools

Several participants called for “better” teachers in Catholic schools, suggesting that too many teachers are not Catholic, and many of those who are Catholic are not practising the faith. There was a concern and a call from some that all teachers in Catholic schools should be practising Catholics.

On the other hand, some participants called for better faith formation and support for both Catholic and non-Catholic teachers.

*Teachers should undertake the RCIA or some other intensive Catechism program, and they should consider their obligation to support the ethos of the school and, thus, the faith.*

Similarly, a number of participants identified a need to support teachers in Catholic schools by providing them with the best resources so they can live out their faith in their roles.

*We need to create the very best resources for schools that support teachers who are*

*not actively living their faith. Teachers do not have time to create their own, investment in engaging digital, interactive resources. We need to provide teachers not just with knowledge but with opportunities that speak to ‘the heart’ and which help our teachers ‘fall in love with’ and see the relevance of faith in their own lives. ... We need teaching resources that engage the heart and not just the head and resources/formation that allows teachers to respond to the tricky questions asked from non-believers.*

### Faith Formation for Parents

A smaller number of participants suggested that it is important for parents of students in Catholic schools to have better formation in the Catholic faith to allow them to communicate it to their children.

*... parents and adults need to be educated further to deepen their understanding of Jesus, so they can pass this information to the younger generation. A suggestion is Catholic schools should have learning sessions for parents and teach them the Catechism. This will help them with teaching their children and even friends.*

One participant noted the importance of parents and Catholic schools working together to influence young people through a lived experience of faith.

*While Catholic schools teach the fundamentals of the Catholic faith (though we cannot assess the effectiveness of this), we believe the greatest influence on the spiritual growth of children is the lived importance of religion in the lives of their parents and how their parents witness to this faith in a concrete and practical way in their daily lives.*



### More Chaplains, Youth Ministers

A small number of participants recommended that more chaplains and youth ministers should be placed in Catholic schools as a link between parishes and schools. One participant noted the “amazing” opportunity for evangelisation that the Catholic schools network in Australia had in connecting with young people.

One parish group used the example of chaplaincy in other Christian denominations:

*Employ chaplains in high schools and youth ministers (female) as in other denominations.*

### Support for Catholic Students in Catholic Schools

As well as support and formation for teachers as mentioned above, a number of participants advocated for greater support for Catholic students in Catholic schools, implying that some feel like a minority within the system.

*Catholic schools no longer serve the purpose of catechising youth, nor do they represent the Catholic faith well to those attending who are not Catholic. This needs to be rectified. I strongly feel the schools alienate our youth by presenting the schools as a Catholic environment, but not really being so. How can youth be expected*

*to feel supported in a place where they are alone as a Catholic, or by a church that is scarcely present in its own institutions?*

One participant thought practicing Catholic students felt alone in their schools:

*There’s simply no support structure for Catholic students in ‘Catholic’ schools. They find themselves isolated in the practice of their faith.*

A few other participants intimated that Catholic schools were not teaching the faith properly and this led to young people “losing their faith” and disconnecting from the Church.

### Teaching Authentic Catholic faith

There were a considerable number of submissions received which focused on the need to teach an “authentic” Catholic faith in Catholic schools. While some participants understood “authentic teaching” to mean “more orthodox”, others understood it to mean “more traditional”.

*Use authentic Catholic curriculum, no comparative religion study but a focus on understanding the foundations of our faith. This would include teaching from the Catholic Catechism, the 10 Commandments, Creed and other prayers for all students in Catholic schools. Knowing and understanding the obligations of being a practicing Catholic.*



*To restore orthodoxy in our churches, schools and other institutions. I received a terrible formation at Catholic schools growing up. I was taught secular sexual ethics and pseudo-sciences. I was also taught virtually nothing about rich Catholic history and tradition.*

*Catholic schools are not teaching the faith! Primary schools do so to some extent half-heartedly, whereas secondary schools are completely infected with indifferentism, whereby they assert that the Catholic religion is just another of many equally valid (heretical) beliefs, thereby demolishing the truth in the minds of students that the Catholic faith is the One, Holy, Universal, Apostolic faith handed down by Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As a result, Catholic doctrine is glossed over, and untaught students are voting with their feet, never to be seen in the Church again after primary school. It is simply a consequence of the fact that you can't believe what you don't know!*

A number of participants cautioned that the Church was not reaping the benefits of Catholic schools by failing to provide quality religious education or religious instruction.

*I think that Catholic schools provide a great opportunity for evangelisation, an opportunity that we are not fully seizing. In Catholic schools, I think religious instruction should rank in importance with subjects such as mathematics or English.*

*I do not understand why over 200 children take part in the annual sacramental program and the following week, after reception, there are only nine at the three Masses in the parish. Is there some deficit*

*in the teaching of religion in Catholic schools?*

*I would like high-quality catechesis at a parish and school level. I believe that the [evangelising] opportunities that exist in the Catholic education system are currently ... missed. ... Most Catholic families I know are unwilling to send their children to the Catholic education system for fear that they will lose their faith, as the previous generation did, rather than be well-catechised or supported in the faith.*

For many participants, teaching authentic faith in schools was linked to the practice of student Mass attendance.

*Our Catholic primary schools must encourage all children to attend Holy Mass on Sunday.*

For other participants, a priority for Catholic schools was to ensure that Mass attendance and other practices and rituals, such as reading the Scriptures or saying of the Angelus, were being undertaken.

*Why are children in Catholic schools taught that it is not necessary that they attend Mass and frequent the sacraments? Why are they not encouraged to pray and read the Scriptures and [not told] that the Scriptures are the infallible word of God that were written that we might come to know, love and serve God better?*

*It is no secret that, in our parish and most others, few children go to Mass, compared to the number of children attending the Catholic school attached to the parish.*

Numerous participants commented on the need for Catholic schools to be unapologetic in the teaching of the faith.

*Religious education has become a wishy-washy 'social justice' education that is practically no different from what is taught in public schools. There is no firm and fearless defence of the faith, no strong promotion of Catholic sexual ethics, no education of children in the basic tenets of*

*the faith as elucidated in the ecumenical councils (most children end up with no idea what the Holy Trinity is or the two natures of Christ or an understanding of Mary as Mother of God), no understanding of the importance of attending Mass and the sacraments etc.*

## Conclusion

Overall, in calling for better Catholic education in schools, participants noted that Catholic schools needed better teachers who were Catholic and who practised the faith, as well as better faith formation for them. Participants also identified a need for more faith formation for parents, in addition to having more chaplains and youth ministers in schools who could be the link for young people between their parish and school. According to some participants, Catholic students in Catholic schools needed greater support, while others called for an authentic, unapologetic Catholic faith to be taught in schools.





## QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- Are we giving enough support for parents as the primary educators of their children in the faith?
- How can schools be appreciated as significant and able contributors to God's mission?
- How can schools be supported in enhancing their Catholic identity in ways that seek to express Catholic faith [accessibly and] which are in dialogue with people's lives, and inspired by the Gospel with faith that seeks understanding?
- How [can] Catholic schools and parish worshipping communities see themselves as being Church together?
- How can we refrain from seeking to blame Catholic schools for the current Church practice rates?
- How is the Church going to make sure Catholic schools and other Catholic organisations are being Catholic in word and action?
- Why are Catholic school children not encouraged to live with their eternal salvation forefront in their thoughts and lives, so that they know how to conduct themselves when they leave school?
- What is the current percentage of practising Catholic school children who are attending Catholic schools? Why don't we insist that to attend a Catholic school, the child and parents must practise the faith?

## RECOMMENDED READING

This report provides the findings of a 2017 survey, to which more than 15,000 young people responded, which sought to study the interactions between young people, the Church and society, and to examine young people's religious practices and Church involvement, and to explore how the Church might better engage with young people. A number of the chapters address the topic of Catholic education in schools.

*Dantis, Trudy and Stephen Reid. 2017. "Called to Fullness of Life and Love: Youth Survey 2017". ACBC Pastoral Research Office. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)*

## Stories of Faith

*Catholic schools have played a major and important part of my life for a considerable amount time. My wife has been a teacher in Catholic schools and my four children have all been educated in Catholic schools. During this time I have seen wonderful work done in the schools, in evangelising and developing the faith of students, parents and staff at these schools. Personally, I have had my own faith challenged and strengthened by my involvement in school organisations and attending school functions. I have recently moved to a different town and have been told that the schools are primarily education facilities and as such the focus must be on academic outcomes rather than being a true Catholic and Christian organisation. This is a great disappointment to me as I have watched as my children have achieved excellent academic outcomes in a true Catholic Christian community. I have been part of RCIA [Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults] and Confirmation programs where participants would not have been at the ceremony, except for their involvement in the Catholic school (I have also listened, with pleasure and pride, to other parents describe the school as "a good school, a bit much God stuff, but still a good school"). I will forever have strong memories of my son's valedictory Mass, where there was such genuine and enthusiastic participation by the students in the Mass.*

*My hope is that all Catholic schools will continue to be true Catholic organisations, especially as it provides such great opportunity to evangelise and grow faith. However, we must be realistic and if this is not possible, we need to ask what is the best use of these facilities and the associated resources. As a parent, I have always believed that I have the primary responsibility in developing a Christian faith in my children, however for a faith to properly grow, it needs nourishment from other sources. For me and my children this has come from our parishes and schools.*

*"I have had my own faith challenged and strengthened by my involvement in school organisations..."*

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## PARISHES

The focus on communities in the submissions now moves from schools to parishes. Issues raised under this topic included the need for stronger parish communities through different means such as paying attention to diminishing parish communities, the formation of small Christian communities, greater emphasis on Parish Pastoral Councils and better interaction between the baby boomer generation and young people. A number of responses addressed the need to create more welcoming parishes and to provide special care for rural parishes. Participants also saw a need for a better interface between parishes and schools, better pastoral planning and greater care for parish volunteers.

### Stronger Parish Communities

One of the most widely discussed themes related to parishes was that of forming stronger parish communities. When participants spoke of stronger communities, they voiced a great need to “support and build a community of faith”, “develop a greater sense of community” among people, be more “warm, welcoming, sharing and caring” and “generate stronger relationships between parish and school communities”. Building friendships and relationships at different levels, between priests and parishioners, between families and individuals in

the community and between parishioners and the wider society, was particularly important. Many also gave the example of early Christian communities for parishes to emulate:

*The community aspect needs to be re-established. We have lost the sense of community. Educate people at Mass to do the simple jobs and place a little more emphasis on the communal event.*

*God is asking us to return to the simplicity and focus of the early Christian communities as inspired by Jesus with*

*a strong accent on leading a loving, caring and holy life, worshipping God and supporting each other.*

Parishes can be strengthened in a number of ways and many participants gave suggestions of how they believed their communities could be unified. These have been described in the sections below.

### Concerns for diminishing parish communities

One of the reasons for strengthening communities was because of recent loss of community in some parishes. Participants from these parishes shared their anguish and pain over the decline in parish participation, particularly in the aftermath of the Royal Commission. Other factors that had contributed to the decline included changes in parish leadership that had resulted in a collapse of lay leadership roles and ministries. One parishioner described her experience:

*I write with concern for the demise of the parish I have been part of for the last 30 years. During that time, I [have] served the parish on many fronts and been involved like many others in the building up of this parish to the great parish that it was. A truly formed parish in the Australian style of Vatican II. I have watched with concern the progress and result of the Royal Commission. I have watched with concern the people who have walked away from our parish in droves. I have watched with concern and have been the receiver of many a seeming rebuff by our two new clerics that the diocese has deemed ‘wise’ to dump on us ... a new insidious kind of priesthood ... holds as little concern ‘the rights and roles of the laity’ who have poured their hearts and souls into this parish for the time it has been in existence.*



Parishioners from rural areas were similarly concerned about their diminishing parish communities that could possibly die out in the near future:

*The future of our Church in this far west is vitally important just as it is in the city. The Church community is spread over vast areas now and has been in the past. Numbers were bigger and many more families attended our community Masses ... Also religious sisters/brothers were very much within the community—this of course added to their involvement in both parish and school. Now we are experiencing less numbers, less families and an older generation. Schools now have lay teachers, principals and the change with religious orders has had an impact on the Church community. As our numbers dwindle, attendance at Masses and our financial status does too. So one can wonder what will become of our little Church community. What can we do to help to make changes?*

Promoting greater respect for and acceptance of all people in the parish and building a solid core of lay leaders, families and young people were suggested as some ways to help alleviate these situations.

### Formation of small Christian communities

A frequent recommendation made for strengthening the parish community was the formation of a number of smaller groups and communities within the parish. These groups would bring people together and be a place where they could pray, share their faith, build friendships and look out for one other. Participants presented many different ideas for groups such as prayer groups or faith-sharing groups, family or

neighbourhood cell groups (fellowship groups of three to seven families to support and encourage each other) and groups with a special focus, for example a social justice group.

*There is value in getting the people in a parish to 'know' each other rather than have this individual faith that is not shared. Small group sharing as in [a] Christian Life Community would help nourish and help people to share their faith life and work towards mission in the world.*

*The parish should be one of warmth, friendship and a sense of belonging to the parish community. Introduction of BECs (Basic Ecclesial Communities).*

Small groups gave members the opportunity to develop and strengthen their spirituality and their relationship with God and to put Gospel values into practice to a greater extent. They helped people experience a greater sense of belonging to the parish community and to develop as better and stronger individuals, thus being able to reach out to others more. Such groups also helped facilitate greater support for people in need such as the sick, lonely or families experiencing a death of a loved one.

### Parish Pastoral Council

A number of participants' responses discussed the formation and development of a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) as an important step towards building better parishes. Many viewed the council as being essential for governance and pastoral ministry so that all lay people, including women and youth, could play a role in discerning and deciding what would contribute to the greater good of parish life.

*Lay people can meet the administrative requirements as many are highly qualified to do so. A Parish Pastoral Council needs to be in every parish and have the power to govern.*

Some comments suggested that such a council needed to be mandated by canon law. Where PPCs were present, there was some concern that they often did not serve their purpose. As one participant explained:

*As a Catholic who has always been fully involved in my Parish all my life I feel very disillusioned to the way our parish is heading. A small handful less than a dozen decide everything. No consultation. No financial statement has been issued for around 10 years. We have [a] Parish Council but no one knows who is on it ... There is no sense or feeling of community.*

There was a need therefore to ensure the Parish Council members were trained and formed in their roles and were given the opportunity and freedom to operate as an advisory body to the parish priest. One participant saw this as being akin to a mini plenary council:

*At parish level, the structure of parish councils ... could operate on discernment and a process similar to this plenary council, but at the parish level. Synodality is almost unknown in our parish, where Father's word contains absolute power. Power needs to be shared with clergy and laity talking about their assumptions and expectations to open up honestly. This would engender hope rather than fear.*

There were also a few suggestions by participants for ways to redefine the role of the Pastoral Council

for better governance. Two of these are described below.

**The Parish Council in a business model:** In this model, the Parish Council plays a key role in planning tasks, strategies and goals for the parish that are executed by leaders in the parish.

*Given the size of most of our parishes, the value of property, money collections and numbers of parishioners most of these parishes are "small businesses". To effectively manage these parishes, they should be well organised and well led ... The parish priest (is like a CEO) and should have a well-formed and discerned Parish Council (similar to a Board) to set strategy and vision. There should be an effective parish leadership team to manage the day-to-day running of the parish in line with the vision set. This structure to be supported by well-formed, resourced and trained ministries.*

**The Parish Council in a shared leadership model:** In this role, the members of the council lead the parish conjointly with the parish priest, thus giving lay people an equal part in the leadership and governance of the parish.

*I refer to a parish leadership structure which involves the laity in a co-leadership model with the parish priest ... The Parish Council would then answer to designated individuals at an archdiocesan level in a spirit of shared praxis. Thus, the overall leadership structure goes broader & deeper. Benefits of adopting this shift would include: more stability and consistency of vision (within a parish) when a parish priest moves on, open parishes up to a greater variety of leadership gifts, give priests more*



*support by sharing the load/responsibility and freeing up priests to devote more time to ministry.*

Several participants also felt that Parish Council members ought to have the right to appoint the priests and leaders of the parish. As one participant explained:

*We also need parishes to be more democratic, with a democratically elected Pastoral Council that manages the parish, has a right to be heard in the selection/appointment of the parish priest, administrator, assistant priest(s) and in their removal if they are not meeting the pastoral needs of their parish community.*

#### **Baby boomer generation listening to young Catholics**

There were a few younger participants who voiced concerns that their views were not taken seriously in the parish. They remarked that some older parishioners, usually those from the baby boomer generation, often objected to their efforts in making changes in the parish, especially when it involved initiating seemingly traditional practices.

*I always felt as a young person we were looked down upon by older generations as though we did not know anything about the faith ... As a youth coordinator, I felt belittled in the lack of acknowledgement and respect people had for the role. The lack of support made me feel like I was alone and unwelcome in the parish which made the job difficult ... [T]here are youth and young adults trying to live a radical life of evangelising in this world, but it's so much harder when the first people we're*

*trying to evangelise are within the Church and very active in our parishes, when we could be evangelising those who are yet to meet God.*

*The baby boomer generation holds nearly total control of near all aspects of the average parish life ... To this day they presume to speak for what young people want and need ... ignoring the voices of the faithful young people in their midst and ignoring the consequences of their well-intended but ill-conceived innovations.*

Participants in this group felt a particular need to be heard and asked that their needs and ideas be encouraged by older parishioners.

#### **More Welcoming Parishes**

Along with building stronger communities, there was also a need expressed for parishes to be more welcoming. A large number of participants spoke about the need to welcome “visitors”, “strangers”, “migrants”, “children”, “non-believers”, “the marginalised—homeless, lonely, divorcees” and many others.

*We need a Church that is vibrant or open to all people at all the times. Parishes should always be welcoming to church-goers, visitors and communities of different backgrounds. The churches and Catholic organisations should be able to adapt to the modern times and be able to make people comfortable, interested and engaged at all times.*

Welcoming visitors and new parishioners was particularly important. Participants recommended that greeters be available at the church doors to

hand out bulletins to people at Mass. A message of welcome could be added to the introductory prayer and members of the congregation could introduce themselves and welcome newcomers. Some participants believed that the specific ministry of hospitality needed to be taken seriously with trained greeters, and not be seen as an optional extra:

*True welcoming is ongoing and constant, needing to be fostered with relentless outreach to the other.*

*Welcoming has a second aspect—those being welcomed need to want to be welcomed. They need to see something that attracts them into wanting a sense of belonging and relationship with us.*

*To make visitors feel welcome and encourage fellowship outside of the Mass (ideas include a welcoming person at [the] entrance to give bulletins as people walk in for 15 minutes before Mass, tea/coffee for 15 minutes after Mass).*

Also, the whole parish community needed to understand and participate in creating a welcoming, caring climate. Another recommendation for welcoming guests was to have information handy in the form of informative signs or cards for those unfamiliar with Church practices, especially the Mass. As one parishioner remarked:

*I often notice in [—] Cathedral ... that tourists regularly attend Mass without knowing what it is, and wander up to Communion, only to be sent away, embarrassed and confused. A basic pamphlet or sign at the door of the church would go a long way towards making visitors feel welcome and decreasing the chances of non-Catholics receiving Communion.*



Greater welcoming demonstrated a parish's sense of hospitality, which was especially important for migrants and refugees:

*With all the immigration and many people moving interstate, parishes need to put more time into welcoming new parishioners, helping them settle and provide connections with other families and ministry.*

Better welcoming was also important for people in the parish community. Participants commented that often parishioners themselves did not mix with one another and there was a need therefore for “more enthusiasm” and “a better sense of community”.

*It is because we love God we want to go to Church and have fellowship with fellow Christians and be part of a community. We need to be community-based and not individuals. We want to be a friendly and welcoming Church too. We need to have more greeters around the church. Not only to give out bulletins but be available even at the end of Mass so people can approach them if they need to be in contact with [the] priest or church ministries, etc. There should be morning tea after each Mass for people to interact.*

There were also some comments stating that participants felt young families, especially parents with younger children, needed to be welcomed better so that they would feel comfortable in the community, especially while attending Mass.

### Special Care of Rural Parishes

Rural parishes face greater challenges as they have limited access to Mass and the sacraments

and are often faced with a loss of community and other socio-economic hurdles. Many participants voiced their fears about these issues and asked for greater support of such parishes and the services provided by them.

*Many rural parishes only have access to the Eucharist once a fortnight or less. However, when the laity offers to hold Communion services in some places, this has been disallowed by the priest in charge of the parish. This leads to the breakdown of parish communities, and the laity are left devoid of the Eucharist often in their more mature years.*

*Somehow there is need to transform from within rather than attempting to impose what is no longer relevant, no longer helpful in leading people to know God loves them beyond imagination, is with them and requires them to be loving people.*

There were a number of suggestions made to help extend the resources of small parishes. Most of these involved extending the roles of lay men and women in the community:

- Allow lay people to celebrate the Sacrament of Anointing when no priest is available;
- Parishes to be led by women and men deacons or lay people where there is no priest;
- Lay people to be formed into ‘parish teams’ to make decisions about the life and worship of their local community and liaise with the local parish priest;
- Small rural churches within a parish to be led in Sunday celebrations by a ‘Minister of the Word’ to enable the local community to continue to meet and support each other;

- Lay managers to be employed to attend to the financial and property management, to take the burden off aged, busy parish priests, to free them up for their pastoral duties;
- Ordaining married men as priests (*virī probatī*);
- More options to be provided for those living in rural areas to fulfil their Sunday obligation (weekday Mass instead of Sunday);
- Priests to live-stream Mass and Communion to parishioners to reduce the travelling demands on priests whilst bringing Mass to remote rural communities and households.

Some of these issues are discussed in greater detail in the themes in chapters 5 and 6. Requests were also made for better children's and youth programs, including access to formation and fellowship with like-minded people for young people. Participants also asked for greater support for their priests and more training to address the cultural differences between a priest from another culture and the local culture of the rural community.

### Better Interface Between Parish and School

Another aspect of building community in a parish was through the parish and school working together. A number of participants felt that the relationships between these two communities needed to be strengthened, recognising that the school was sometimes the only experience of church which teachers, parents and students had.

*Parishes should have a library of spiritual books in the church so parishioners can*

*borrow or sit in church and read books and be educated.*

Some examples provided of the resources that such libraries could offer included CDs, classics in Christian doctrine and parent education resources to accompany sacramental classes. Book clubs could help build community through like-minded people meeting and also increasing participants' knowledge of the faith.

The need for better faith formation is a theme discussed more fully in chapter 4.

### Pastoral Planning

Planning was another theme discussed under the topic of “parishes”. Most participants wanted lay people to have greater input into future financial and pastoral plans for their parishes. There was a clear need for people to come together and discern the signs of the times and then address and act on what changes need to be made.

*[God is asking us] to ask questions of the Church—what does it stand for, and how will it deal with challenges now, and in the future? To plan for the future Church that will consist of lower numbers of people, but still be filled with people of a strong faith that want to meet together and pray.*

Planning also involved better communication between parishes and the prudent use of parish resources. As one parishioner explained:

*What we find in parishes ... is some are very engaged and active and some are not aware of what is happening even in the neighbouring parishes. Therefore, it would*



*be a good endeavour to have some sort of way to gather all the faithful together by way of announcements in every parish, through the bulletin perhaps, of events and faith building events in parishes of the archdiocese.*

Some participants also asked for strengthening of the role of the Parish Pastoral Council, a theme discussed more fully in the sections above.

### Care for Volunteers

Most parishes have a team of parishioners who selflessly give of their time and talents to manage the place and keep things running smoothly. There was some concern that new child safety regulations might bring in extra formalities that would dissuade parishioners from offering their services. As one participant explained:

*Volunteers ... must not be burned down with loads of bureaucracy (paperwork,*

*meetings, etc.). If this occurs, then some will comply with any requirements no matter what, others will find the loopholes ... whilst the majority will decide (quite rightly) that the whole thing is a 'load of garbage' and simply ignore the lot. If any attempt was to be made to make the second and third groups comply, their response would most likely be to simply give up being a volunteer and, if this occurred, the Church in Australia would end up with very few people to do the many jobs which make the Church what it is today.*

A few participants were of the view that better care was needed for this group with ongoing training and appreciation of their work expressed.

## Conclusion

This chapter examined the topic of parishes in relation to participants' voiced need for supporting them and building a community of faith that was welcoming, closely-knit and modelled on the early Christian communities. There were concerns for the loss of community in rural parishes and in parishes where lay leadership roles and ministries were in decline. One strong recommendation for strengthening parishes was through the formation of small groups where people could meet and pray together and share their faith. This could also help them build friendships and strengthen their sense of belonging to the parish.

The formation of a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) was also an important step in building better parishes and was essential for good governance and pastoral ministry especially if lay people had a discerning and decisive voice on it. Two models of pastoral councils were proposed. There was also a need strongly felt by some younger participants to be heard better and for their ideas be encouraged by older parishioners, especially those in the baby boomer generation.

The findings within this topic also identified strongly a need to create more welcoming parish communities, especially for visitors, newer parishioners and those unfamiliar with parish life or Church practices. Rural parishes required greater care and there were a number of suggestions put forward to help alleviate the challenges they faced. Participants also recommended building better relationships between the school and parish communities to allow for a broader experience of church for school families. Setting up a parish library or book club was suggested to offer adult faith formation resources and greater lay input was recommended in financial and pastoral planning for the future. Finally, participants requested better training and care for parish volunteers and a greater appreciation of their work.

## QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- How can we build and sustain effective parish communities and high-quality pastoral leadership?
- How do we encourage and engage the youth in our parish community to keep their faith?
- How can we meet the needs of all groups in a parish setting?
- How do we address basic needs of parish members?
- Christian unity is wonderful and should be encouraged, but how can this be done without taking away from being Catholic and the parish communities and congregations?
- How do we engage people to be members of their parish community?
- Can individual parishes be allowed to include the cultural traditions relevant to their communities so practices are more culturally aligned and reflect their communities (e.g. baptism in local rivers)?
- What does the Church see as the role of the parish?



## RECOMMENDED READING

This Handbook draws on the Building Stronger Parishes research project and identifies factors that lead to parish vitality. It provides case studies of examples of what can be achieved in eight key areas that lead to stronger parishes.

*Dantis, Trudy. 2015. "A Handbook for Building Stronger Parishes". Garratt Publishing.*

Based on findings from the Building Stronger Parishes research project, this first in a series of six topic reports examines the internal relationships that exist within a parish, among parish leaders, staff and parishioners. The experience of community and a sense of belonging of parishioners in participating parishes is also explored, as well as community building and hospitality.

*Dantis, Trudy. 2015. "Building Stronger Parishes: Project Topic Report 1: Community Building, Welcoming and Hospitality". ACBC Pastoral Research Office. Available to purchase at [www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Building-Stronger-Parishes-Report-1-Community-building-Welcoming/p/66399321/category=4727032](http://www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Building-Stronger-Parishes-Report-1-Community-building-Welcoming/p/66399321/category=4727032)*

This final topic report, in the series of six from the Building Stronger Parishes research project, investigates parish pastoral planning processes and visioning, and the challenges of adaptability that change can have on parishes and parish leaders.

*Dantis, Trudy and Richard Rymarz. 2015. "Building Stronger Parishes: Project Topic Report 6: Planning". ACBC Pastoral Research Office. Available to purchase at [www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Building-Stronger-Parishes-Report-6-Planning/p/57454488/category=4727032](http://www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Building-Stronger-Parishes-Report-6-Planning/p/57454488/category=4727032)*

This paper identifies the main factors influencing Mass attenders' sense of belonging to their parish. Using data from the National Church Life Survey, its author shows that Mass attenders' perception of the leadership qualities of their priests and other parish leaders has a powerful bearing on their sense of belonging to their parish.

*Dixon, Robert. 2014. "What Makes People Feel they Belong?: Contemporary Cultural Change and the Acceptance of Key Catholic Beliefs and Moral Teachings by Australian Mass Attenders." ACBC Pastoral Research Office. Available at [www.ncpr.catholic.org.au](http://www.ncpr.catholic.org.au)*

## Stories of Faith

*I was born into a Catholic family and experienced a stable childhood, Catholic education at a time when life centred around a parish. One of my early memories is a nun sharing her love of the Eucharist and making Mass for me a meaningful experience. When as a teenager my eldest sister left home to live overseas and another sister went interstate to become a nun I felt my connection with them was continued through Mass. I was fortunate enough to be a member of YCW [Young Christian Workers], which I owe for my experience of meeting Christ in the Gospels and for creating a meaning to my life. My world became my altar and the awareness of social justice and love of neighbour colours my spirituality today. I married someone from overseas, we were a struggling family with five children when we received word that his father was dying. Some of our fellow parishioners organised a collection to fund his fare home. This overwhelming sense of community within the Church of the eighties is something I hold very dear.*

*"My world became my altar and the awareness of social justice and love of neighbour colours my spirituality today."*

# 16 BRINGING THE CHURCH INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

There was an overarching focus in the responses on bringing Church practices and teachings into the 21st century. Participants highlighted the desire for the Church to promote itself better through a range of communication channels. They also identified the need for the Church to modernise teachings to reflect the social, biological and spiritual beliefs of contemporary Australian society. There was also a small group of respondents that wanted a radical overhaul of the organisational structure of the Church, which was termed “inverting the pyramid”.

## Positive Church Public Relations

A large number of participants highlighted their “concern for the lack of positive public relations circulated about the Church”. Participants felt that placing a greater emphasis on communication could help the Church be a more “transparent institution”. There were concerns that at times the “Church hierarchy’s communication was fragmented”, resulting in a call for a more “united message” from the Church leadership. A focus in public relations on the positive aspects of the Church’s mission and activities in society would offer a more balanced narrative and, potentially, reporting of the Church

in the popular media. For example, one participant stated the need for:

*the bishops ... [to] use any and all means of communication to spread the Good News—perhaps a weekly newspaper column, a blog, a 10-minute TV session once a week, and using social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook).*

This quote also highlighted another important issue, the need for better communication. Many participants felt that the Church needed to use social media more for its communication. According to them, the digital presence of the Church was lacking

and increasing this could expand the Church’s communication potential. As one participant stated:

*The internet is a key medium of this generation and [the] future. The Australian Catholic websites need to be modernized and improved to explain the aim of faith and following Jesus. I attempted to find out what the Church is all about and what God is about—and I was surprised that this was not a prominent and simple message [of] ‘the Church’s aim!’ on the main webpage.*

## Modernise Church Teachings

A significant aspect of the topic Bringing the Church into the 21st century was modernising Church teachings. There were six key issues raised relating to modernising Church teaching: contraception and in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), same-sex marriage, abortion and euthanasia issues, the concept of

sin, liturgy and sacraments and outdoor marriage celebrations. The following sections explore each of these issues.

### Allow contraception and IVF

There were many different reasons given for why participants wanted the Church’s teachings on contraception and IVF practices revised. For example, one participant stated:

*We believe the use of artificial birth control needs to be revisited. We have two beautiful grandchildren that we would not have had if it wasn’t for IVF. They are clearly a gift from God.*

A further reason for the Church to change its teaching on contraception was concerns raised about the unsustainable global population:

Supporting  
same-sex  
marriage

Modernising  
Church  
teachings

Positive  
Church  
public  
relations

Changing  
the concept  
of sin

On liturgy  
and  
sacraments

Marriages  
celebrated  
in parks and  
on beaches

Radical change,  
a new order,  
inverted pyramid

Supporting  
abortion  
and  
euthanasia

Allowing  
contraception  
and IVF



*In a world of growing population, which our environment cannot sustain into the future, birth control needs to be formally accepted as a moral imperative for the developing world in particular.*

Some participants felt that a modernising of Church teachings on contraception needed to be conditional. A concern raised in particular was the method of contraception used. For example, one participant stated that the Church should “[a]llow contraception which is non-threatening to embryos”. Therefore condoms would be acceptable, however the pill, which has the potential to abort a foetus, would not.

### Supporting same-sex marriage

The issue of same-sex marriage also featured in the theme concerning modernising Church teachings. Some participants felt that there should be opportunities for same-sex couples to get married in the Catholic Church. As one participant stated:

*A few moral issues being put forward: ... the Church to fall in line with current society standards ... gay marriage to be legitimised within the Church by marrying or blessing the unions, legitimising gay lifestyles.*

Participants believed that these changes to Church attitudes would foster an “[a]cceptance of people who are different”. Many participants indicated that same-sex couples who chose to marry should be accepted into the Catholic Church.

### Supporting abortion and euthanasia

As with the responses to modernising Church teachings on contraception, some participants felt

that it was crucial to do the same with regards to abortion and euthanasia. One reason for this included a perceived incorrect interpretation of Scripture, as demonstrated in this response:

*Stop objecting to abortion and contraception. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that life begins at conception, and it is high time you trusted women to make the most appropriate health decisions for themselves.*

This quote also articulated another rationale for change, “trust for the individual making the decision”. There were also considerations for the “welfare of all parties” concerned relating to these issues. For example, one participant stated, “I am in favour of euthanasia and abortion when the welfare of the elderly, sick, mothers-to-be, unborn babies are in question”. There were also justifications for supporting euthanasia through having “compassion for the terminally ill”. Finally, participants felt that the Church needed to “[d]eal more humanely” with both these issues.

### Changing the concept of sin

A fourth issue within the theme of modernising Church teachings was changing the concept of sin in the Church. One reason for this was a consideration of the effects sin had on individuals. Demonstrating this thinking was this response:

*Science supports that some human behaviours are natural and therefore cannot be considered sinful such as sex [and] masturbation. The rules the Catholic Church have in place can only have terrible effects on mental health because of the guilt placed on young people who are fighting internally as to what is a natural*

*function of the human body and what is considered a sin in the Catholic Church.*

There was also a belief that the notion of sin did not fit into the 21st century, and the whole concept needed to be re-thought. For example:

*The issue of sin needs to be reviewed. The more accurate translation of sin from the Aramaic is “missing the mark”. Children should not live in fear of sinning. They should be encouraged to reflect on encounters and choices that they have made and wonder how they could have done things differently.*

Furthermore, participants felt that focusing on sin highlighted doctrine such as redemption and sacrifice at the cost of love. As one participant stated:

*Basically what is needed is an effort to bring the Church and its teachings into the modern world, making sure that things are logical and take account of modern scientific knowledge. For a start, the whole concept of original sin needs to be re-explored. The notion of a “fall” and God punishing all mankind ... simply cannot be sustained in the light of modern knowledge ... Jesus’ life and teaching could be made more meaningful without sacrifice and redemption dominating everything. The idea of a vengeful God demanding the suffering and death of Jesus as expiation is totally primitive and cannot possibly be equated with a loving God.*

### On liturgy and sacraments

Another key issue within the theme Bringing the Church into the 21st century was modernising the liturgy and sacraments. This included modernising

rituals, language and readings. For example, one participant stated:

*Modernise practices with less focus on rituals. More focus on inclusivity within the Church, making our place in society more relevant. Making an effort to bridge the gap between ... [the] Catholic community and ... contemporary society.*

There were also several participants who felt that the liturgy of today “did not reflect Australian values”. Therefore, there needed to be opportunities to reflect these distinct values in the liturgy. As one participant stated:

*We need to have an Australian Church for Australians, reflecting the particular Christian values of this land such as tolerance and mateship. The bishops need to be courageous in prosecuting issues of the Australian Church with Rome, such as revising the liturgy.*

### Marriages celebrated in parks and on beaches

There were a number of responses where participants believed that the Church rules surrounding marriage needed to change. One reason for the need to modernise the thinking of having marriage celebrations outside a church was concern for the “falling Church population” and the increase in the number of Catholics marrying non-Catholics. As one participant explained:

*When a Catholic marries a non-Catholic they should be able to have outdoor Mass as a choice. Many churches have grounds that could easily accommodate ... these and other occasions ... many young Catholics choose civil ceremonies as the only alternative.*



A further benefit proposed of allowing marriage celebrations outside of churches is that there can be greater inclusion of people who have already married outside the Church as demonstrated in this response:

*[There needs to be] acceptance of Catholics who have previously married outside the Church.*

Therefore, some participants felt that modernising this Church teaching would foster a more inclusive Church community and increase Church participation.

### Radical Change, a New Order, Inverted Pyramid

There were many suggestions for radical changes to the Church in the responses to Plenary Council 2020. An article by Rev Dr Ormond Rush on the Plenary Council website had highlighted Pope Francis's thinking on synodality and his image of an "inverted pyramid". Pope Francis states:

*[S]ynodality is a constitutive element of the Church. In this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located beneath the base. (Rush, 2017, p.5)*

There were many different interpretations of "inverting the pyramid" from participants. Some wanted a radical change to the Church structures and increased servant leadership, while others wanted collaboration between the Church hierarchy and laity.

One such suggestion for radical change interpreted "inverting the pyramid" in terms of a movement to turn the Church hierarchy on its head and having a lay-led Church. For example:

*There needs to be a shift in the power structures of the Church. The pyramid needs to be turned upside down with the laity on the top and the hierarchy to be truly at the service of the people.*

*Leadership in our Church must remember that it is part of the community it leads. Leadership cannot exist without community and its role does not make sense without community. Our leadership must listen and care for the community and act on the concerns of community. The governance of a healthy community is based on a flipped-over-pyramid model with the hierarchy at the bottom of the pyramid and the people at the top.*

Demonstrating Pope Francis's thinking on synodality was this participant's response:

*There is an urgent need to change the governance of our Church with bishops and priests at the top of the pyramid to governance where the laity are also present at the top. In other words, invert the governance pyramid. It is only by changing Church authority structures [that] authentic listening [can] take place. An authentic listening where everyone learns and participates.*

## Conclusion

This chapter analysed responses related to different aspects of bringing the Church into the 21st century. Several participants urged the Church to embrace more positive forms of public relations. These included the Church being more transparent, Church leadership presenting a more unified message and the Church embracing new forms of media such as web-based platforms.

Participants also advocated for modernised Church teachings. This included allowing contraception and IVF practices in particular contexts. Furthermore, some promoted the acceptance of same-sex marriage and support for abortion and euthanasia so as to offer increased consideration of the welfare of all parties. Some participants believed that the concept of sin needed to change, as the notion was outdated in the 21st century. Moreover, there was a belief that rituals, language and readings pertaining to liturgy and sacraments should be modernised to reflect Australian values. Participants also promoted access to Catholic marriage ceremonies outside of a Catholic church. This could encourage people to stay a part of the Church community and offer opportunities to include people who had married outside the Church.

Finally, a radical change to the structure and model of leadership described as "inverting the pyramid" was seen to be of critical importance. There were many different interpretations of this model. Some participants believed that the Church leadership structure should be flipped upside down with a lay-led Church. Others felt that the Church hierarchy should exercise a servant leadership model, with the leaders on the bottom of the pyramid and the laity at the top. Others still felt there should be collaboration between the clergy and laity in leading the Church.





## QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- Will the Church ever consider changing its official stance on issues that put us at odds with the secular community—homosexuality, sex before marriage, birth control, married priests and female priests?
- Why does the Church want to control women, especially in reproductive matters?
- Will there be a review and revitalisation of rules about marriage?
- Why has the hierarchy failed to publicise the good works undertaken by our schools, hospitals, refugee support, etc.?
- How will the Church better market itself and promote the positive aspects of 'church' to a consumerist society?
- How can the Church shift the focus from the intricacies and specific rules in the tradition to a focus on Jesus' mission and values?
- How does the Church plan to adapt to a changing world?
- How is the Church engaging in a modern and changing world?
- How does the Church law allow for inclusion of all peoples? Do we need to adapt these laws to a changing world?
- What is it about how the Church understands sexuality and marriage today that prevents us from sanctifying same-sex marriage in the same way that we sanctify a marriage where the participants are unable to naturally bear children and/or choose adoption, surrogacy or accept childlessness? Isn't it also based on a lifelong commitment of love between two human beings—a joining of two lives—with God and community as witness?

## RECOMMENDED READING

This article highlights Pope Francis's calls for the Church hierarchy to listen to and hear the laity, which is termed an inverted pyramid. This is Pope Francis's understanding of a synodal Church.

Rush, Ormond. 2017. "Plenary Council Participation and Reception: Synodality and Discerning the Sensus Fidelium." [www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/OrmRushParticipationReception.pdf](http://www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/OrmRushParticipationReception.pdf)

## Stories of Faith

*Having been baptised at the age of eight I have always tried to practise my faith as from the Church's teachings. I myself and members of my family have had our share of bad experiences with the Church. My own mother married a fellow who had been studying for the priesthood and had left after finding he was not suited. The marriage was never consummated because he could not bring himself to being a husband in this respect. The relationship broke down then she met my father. This was many years ago when divorce was considered a no-no and there was no financial welfare available. My father and mother never married but stayed lifetime partners. My aunt had to be married in the vestry as her partner would not turn a Catholic. They remained lifetime partners. My cousin was physically handled by a young Italian priest when she attended a pre-wedding instruction class. She has never gone back to the Church. I was accused by an elderly priest in the confessional of doing sexual acts with a boy, he wanted to know all details. I was only about eleven or twelve years of age at the time and had no idea what he was on about but realised it was not good and made me feel very uncomfortable. He even made me confess to this before he would give me absolution. I never told my mother because I thought she would not believe me. ... I was also denied communion when my own marriage broke up because I didn't have an annulment from the Church when I met someone else, which in time finally came through after much stress. I am a practising Christian and a member of the Church but my faith is in God. He knows me, my life story and he is the one that forgives.*

*"I am a practising Christian and a member of the Church but my faith is in God."*

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## BETTER PLENARY COUNCIL PROCESS

Finally, a substantial number of responses specifically discussed the Plenary Council process. These participants indicated that they were sceptical of the Plenary Council process, raising concerns about its potential to make a change to the Church. People also expressed disappointment that there were not more lay people or women given decision-making roles on the Plenary Council. There were also calls for a Plenary Council to be held more frequently in Australia. Some participants also questioned whether a Plenary Council was even necessary.

### Scepticism about the Plenary Council process

Many participants' responses were cynical about the whole Plenary Council process. Sceptical views included that the Plenary Council only had limited scope to bring about change which would make it ineffective. For example, one participant stated:

*The key issues which need to be addressed as part of this cannot be resolved by the Australian Plenary Council—they can only be addressed by a Universal Council - a Vatican III.*

Some participants felt that the Plenary Council process lacked substance and would not result in any meaningful change in the Church. These concerns are captured in these two quotes:

*I worry that the Plenary Council will become ... a political talkfest and no real changes will result.*

*I really do hope that the Plenary Council will listen carefully to the people and that this is not just a 'talkfest' with little outcome or change. I hope there are many more ordinary people in the decision-making than clergy.*

There were also some participants who were of the view that the Plenary Council was a waste of time as change would only take place if it benefited the decision-makers:

*I believe this Plenary Council will be another waste of time and money as the bishops will not accept or see the need for radical change unless it is in their interest. With this in mind, this Council will be a waste of time.*

Another participant stated:

*Scepticism voiced if change would happen through Plenary Council as numbers of attendants are heavily stacked in favour of clergy, so views of laity will possibly be ignored. There will, nevertheless, be papal approval required for the agenda.*

### Exclusion of Lay People from the Decision-Making Roles on the Plenary Council

Some participants raised concerns about the lack of lay people included on the Plenary Council. This imbalance was judged to be an act of clericalism by one participant:

*The structure of the Plenary Council, with minimal lay people and priests, is of concern and symptomatic of entrenched clericalism. An inclusive Church would not operate in this way.*

A further concern raised over the structure of the Plenary Council was its undemocratic model of voting rights in which most Australian Catholics were excluded from the decision-making process. For example, as these participants explained:

Plenary Council not necessary

Sceptical about the Plenary Council process

More frequent Plenary Councils in Australia

Exclusion of lay people from the decision-making roles on the Plenary Council

Exclusion of women from the decision-making roles on the Plenary Council



*The hierarchy represents one per cent and the laity constitute the other 99 per cent. How will the Plenary Council achieve equity without genuine voting rights?*

*The need for the forthcoming meeting not to be hidebound by canon law pertaining to a plenary council but rather a meeting of the Australian people of God in which voting patterns can follow normal procedures with all participants regardless of their status, having a [deliberative] vote.*

The restriction of lay people not having a majority say in the Plenary Council voting process was a concern for many participants, as was the perceived exclusion of women from the process.

## Exclusion of Women from the Decision-Making Roles on the Plenary Council

A noteworthy number of participants were disappointed that the Plenary Council would lack the contribution of women. As one participant stated: “In the decision-making of the Plenary Council, there will be no woman’s voice”. Another participant expressed concern that the omission of women from the decision-making process was a serious problem:

*Women should not be only seen as parish assistants or tea-making ladies. We should be looking to women to be actively involved in decision-making roles in the formal Church. We pointedly note that, in this Plenary Council, women will have no role in the decision-making! This is a serious*

*problem in looking to making decisions on the future of a Church that seeks to serve all peoples.*

Some participants believed that women who represented the majority of the Church community should, therefore, have a more substantial say in the future of the Catholic Church in Australia:

*The majority of parishioners in our parish are female, and yet they have no voice in our patriarchal Church and will be under-represented at the Plenary Council.*

Moreover, participants felt that religious women also needed to have a larger say in the legislative process of the Plenary Council:

*Women should have a greater voice and be given voting rights in the Church—we find that it is appalling that women religious representatives to the Plenary Council do not have voting rights.*

## Plenary Council Not Necessary

There was a small number of participants who felt that holding a Plenary Council was unnecessary. They expressed fears that the Plenary Council was too open-ended. For example, as one participant explained:

*It has been rumoured that we as Catholics can expect changes. Are these things that are being portrayed in the forthcoming Plenary Council agenda the beginning of them? The agenda to us sounds suspect and why has Australia been given the go ahead for this particular open-ended council that invites anyone to air their views regardless of their faith commitment or orientation? Hopefully, the Holy Spirit will make His presence felt during this time ahead. Decisions of the majority are not always right. Asking the malinformed and uneducated Catholic public to [charter] the*



*Catholic Church path and plan is simply wrong.*

Another participant also found the input of the wider community concerning:

*I find this Plenary Council very troubling given that 'all people' are given the opportunity to convey their thoughts, whether they have faith or practise it, or even any knowledge of the 'truth'. Why are we joining with unbelievers and allowing them to alter God's Word?*

There was also a feeling from some participants that the Word of God did not instruct people to hold Plenary Councils and, therefore, they were not necessary.

*The Gospels make it very clear. Go and preach the Gospel. Nowhere does it say to organise a Plenary Council.*

### More Frequent Plenary Councils in Australia

Many participants wanted the Church to hold Plenary Councils more frequently. For example, one participant called for a legislative change for a

more frequent review of canon law:

*Canon law needs to be reformed to support changes and should be reviewed every 10-15 years to ensure it is up-to-date; canon law should not be used as a block to change; laity should be participants in the making of canon law.*

Some participants believed that Plenary Councils should be held every 10 years or even continually. For example:

*Plenary Councils should also occur on a regular basis—perhaps every decade.*

*To this end, I propose an ongoing Plenary Council that meets whenever there is an urgent need for change. Not as it meets now—only every 80 years.*

Another participant suggested that the Listening and Dialogue sessions held around the country should continue in parishes after the Plenary Council has finished:

*The Listening and Dialogue groups should continue after the Plenary Council to provide support in the parish.*

## Conclusion

The need for better Plenary Council processes was a central topic of many submissions. Some participants were sceptical of the process citing the inability for Australia to effect change in a universal Church. There were also fears the Plenary Council was a political talkfest and participants demonstrated a general cynical belief that nothing would change. The lack of lay people involved in the decision-making process of Plenary Council was another concern raised with the process. Participants were troubled that the Plenary Council process excluded women's voices from the council. And especially concerning for participants was the lack of religious women and the fact that the majority of church-goers were women, yet they were not represented.

A few participants felt that there was no need to hold a Plenary Council. There was a belief that the open-ended structure of the Plenary Council agenda could be damaging to the Church and that there was no precedent in the Gospel to hold a Plenary Council. Finally, a number of participants felt Plenary Councils needed to be held more frequently. This could include a continuing Plenary Council to deal with issues as they arise and the continued implementation of Listening and Dialogue sessions in parishes after the culmination of the Plenary Council.

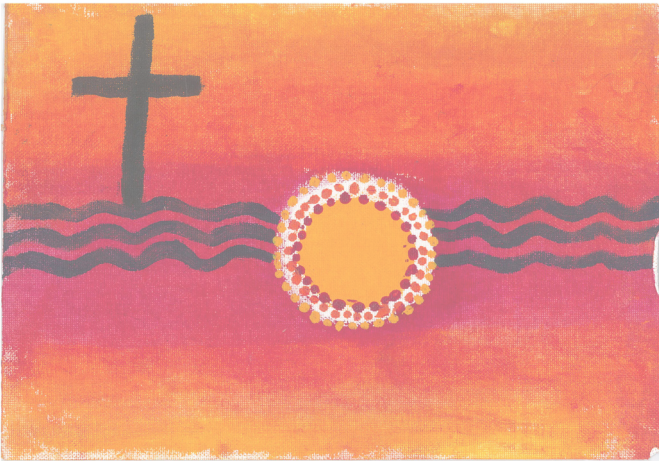




# QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Below are a sample of the questions participants asked within this topic in their submissions to the Plenary Council.

- Why can't lay people have a deliberative vote at this Plenary Council?
- Is there any conversation envisaged whereby this approach according to law can be viewed more compassionately to include a fairer balance of appropriately informed female and male members of the Church participating?
- Will the submission to the Plenary Council go through to the bishops and then to Rome unfiltered?
- Will this Plenary Council have any effect or is it just a facade?
- Why is the Plenary Council trying to change the Church in Australia?
- Will there be more group discussions after a story has been told?
- Will the Plenary Council be able to implement real change for the people of Australia?
- Will the Plenary Council act, as well as listen?
- Why has the Plenary Council taken so long?





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## CONCLUSION

This report explored the content of submissions made in response to the question “What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?” in Phase 1: Listening and Dialogue of the Plenary Council process. The report provided an overview of the themes that appeared in the submissions. The most striking feature of the analysis spread across the previous chapters was the great diversity represented and the thoughtfulness of responses provided by those who either participated in a group Listening and Dialogue session or who provided their own individual submission. The topics raised by participants covered many aspects of Church and everyday life, and the opinions held on many subjects were diverse, with sometimes opposing views.

Through their responses, participants shared their hopes and dreams for the Church in Australia along with their experiences of joy, frustration or sadness. They expressed a strong desire to be heard and a fervent need for their voices to be acknowledged

and valued. There was a positive movement towards growth and change, envisioning new approaches to “being Church”. The extent of participation and the in-depth nature of the responses certainly seemed to suggest that many were willing to contribute to making this a reality.

Overall, while the breadth and variety of responses was immense, there was, nevertheless, a common thread through the majority of the submissions for a Church that was focused on the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. This emerged in the initial discernment, undertaken by the Plenary Council Facilitation Team and the Plenary Council Executive Committee, and has informed the second stage of the Plenary Council journey, in which six National Themes for Discernment have been identified. These are presented as the question—*How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church in Australia that is:*

- *Missionary and evangelising;*
- *Inclusive, participatory and synodal;*
- *Prayerful and Eucharistic;*
- *Humble, healing and merciful;*
- *A joyful, hope-filled and servant community;*
- *Open to conversion, renewal and reform.*

Each of these National Themes for Discernment links with a number of themes presented in this report. For example, the first theme, “a Christ-centred Church that is missionary and evangelising”, predominantly covers themes discussed in Chapter 11 such as encouraging vocations, evangelisation in and of the family, focus on mission, being missionary disciples and sharing the faith with others. However, it also relates to the missionary and evangelising aspects of themes covered throughout the report, such as the Church adapting to a multicultural reality, better training and support for youth leaders, better faith formation, being a witness in society, greater inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, outreach to the wider community and fighting for human rights issues.

Similarly the fourth theme, “a Christ-centred Church that is humble, healing and merciful”, predominantly covers themes discussed in Chapter 8, such as better implementation of Royal Commission recommendations, a call to repentance for clergy sexual abuse, greater concern for victims and survivors, healing liturgies and public signs or acts of reparation, more transparency and accountability, and healing and moving beyond the scandal. However, it also relates to themes in other chapters such as ending clericalism, greater leadership from bishops and priests, more welcoming parishes,

inclusion of the divorced and remarried, care for neighbour, reducing the margins between rich and poor, ending discrimination of LGBTI and outreach to all the baptised, among others.

A more complete explanation of each of the six National Themes for Discernment relating to the topics covered in this report have been compiled into six Snapshot Reports. These reports also contain a sample of quotes from participants along with some of the stories they shared. The six Snapshot Reports can be found as Appendices 15 to 20.

The analysis of the Phase 1 submissions for this report was a distinctive task that does not lend itself easily to comparison with other work. Certainly, the entire undertaking was broader than a typical research study, as it was embedded in the larger Plenary Council process that was immersed in prayer and discernment, and involved the engagement and support of people in parishes, dioceses, community groups and agencies around Australia.

Being a unique undertaking, this comprehensive report serves as the first stage in presenting participants’ responses to the Plenary Council questions. The findings in this report, along with the Snapshot Reports, will serve as tools for Phase 2: Listening and Discernment, where ongoing conversation, further prayer and discernment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will direct the process further towards determining the agenda for Plenary Council 2020.

The National Centre for Pastoral Research, on behalf of the Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council, sincerely thanks the many thousands of people whose voices make up this report and whose honest and authentic contribution will help to shape the future of the Church in Australia.



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## Appendix 1: Plenary Council Launch Guide



### Plenary Council Launch – Prayers and Resources

#### 1. Prayer of the Faithful

For the Plenary Council 2020:

We pray for the Church in Australia as we prepare for the Plenary Council in 2020. May we listen to what the Spirit is saying as we share with one another our stories of faith. We pray for courage to speak boldly and for compassion to listen with open and humble hearts.

[Alternative] We pray for the Church in Australia as we prepare for the Plenary Council in 2020. May we listen to what the Spirit is saying as we share with one another our joys and hopes, and then speak humbly of what we have heard.

#### 2. Bulletin Notice

**Plenary Council 2020 – Listen to what the Spirit is saying.**

Pope Francis has approved the Australian Bishops' decision to hold a Plenary Council in Australia in 2020 and 2021. It is a significant moment for the Church in Australia to make decisions about the future.

To prepare the agenda for the Plenary Council, all of God's people are invited to reflect on the question: *"What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?"* Find out more about the Plenary Council 2020 at the new website, now online: [www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)

#### 3. Pentecost Sunday Readings

First Reading	Acts 2:1-11
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 104: 1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34
	<i>Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.</i>
Second Reading	1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13
Gospel	Jn 20:19-23



#### 4. Homily Notes

Key Messages combining the celebration of Pentecost, the Year of Youth and the launch of the Listening and Dialogue Encounters as we prepare for the Plenary Council 2020.

- At the time of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit enabled all people to understand one another. The Holy Spirit transcended all languages, customs and cultures and the early communities of faith were able to listen to one another and hear the message of Jesus, of God's great love for the world.
- Today, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we look toward the future and begin the process of preparing for the Plenary Council. We, too, will need to rely on the gifts of the Holy Spirit to speak boldly, and to listen humbly and with open hearts to one another and especially to God.
- The Plenary Council gives us all an opportunity to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church in Australia. We are going to build the agenda for the Plenary Council together, through dialogue – we will practise talking with one another, even if we disagree. In the midst of dialogue, we can hear God's voice. Every one of us is invited to listen to God by listening to one another.
- Alongside the preparation for the Plenary Council, this year we are celebrating the Year of Youth. Our young people are like those early Christians when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost – anointed and sent, they have the energy and vibrancy of youth and we all are nourished by their witness and their faith.
- The Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue Encounters and the Year of Youth are ways in which the Church in Australia can express the spirit of Pentecost today. We call upon the Holy Spirit to guide us, to help us hear God's voice as we ask *"What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?"*
- In coming weeks, as a parish community, we will gather together to listen to one another, to reflect on this question and share our own stories of faith, and our experiences of the Church. After we talk together, we will collate our stories and ideas and the questions we have about the future of the Church and give our submission online through the Plenary Council webpage.





## Appendix 2: Plenary Council Parish Guide



## 5. Other Resources for Parish Mass / Pentecost Launch

*The Plenary Council Webpage*

[plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)

- Prayer Cards [artwork for printing]
- Plenary Council Song
- Listening and Dialogue Encounter
- Listening and Dialogue Facilitation Guides

*Plenary Council YouTube Channel*

*You could play these in sequential weeks for your parish community, and invite discussion or questions afterwards.*

- a. Promotional Video [75 secs]  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exNXH2YcB8Y>
- b. Archbishop Timothy's Invitation [5:19secs]  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRVY7\\_uYCM4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRVY7_uYCM4)
- c. Introduction to the Plenary Council [9:20secs]  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZdk5ez3EcM>

*Plenary Council Facilitation Team*

Ms Lana Turvey-Collins [M: 0481 915 201]  
Mr Peter Gates  
Fr Noel Connolly



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**ParishGuide**

Leading your parish community to be part of the Plenary Council 2020.

**Welcome**

Thank you for taking the initiative to ensure that your parish community is a part of the Plenary Council 2020. Every person's story and experience of faith, and the Church, is important and it is essential that every effort is made to reach out and include as many people as possible as we endeavour to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.

**Using this Guide**

These few pages are a practical guide to getting started in your parish community. This is accompanied by the *Listening and Dialogue Encounter*.

Below you will find a suggested week-by-week program of activities to lead your parish community and ensure they are able to give their voice to the Plenary Council 2020.

These activities are simply suggestions and only a beginning. The intent of this guide is to provide an introduction – something just to get started, to ignite your community's imagination and encourage all people to participate, bringing their gifts and talents together to reach as many parts of your local neighbourhood community and consider together the future to which God is calling the Church in Australia.

**Questions, Ideas and Feedback**

As you use this guide, sharing your experience can help others. If you have ideas for how this guide can be improved, questions you need answered or pictures of your community coming together for listening and dialogue, please contact us on the details below:

*Plenary Council Facilitation Team*

Phone: 02 9919 7800  
Mobile: 0481 915 201  
Email: [plenary.council@catholic.org.au](mailto:plenary.council@catholic.org.au)

Speak boldly,  
and listen  
with open and  
humble  
hearts.

[f](https://www.facebook.com/plenarycouncil2020) [t](https://twitter.com/plenarycouncil2020) [i](https://www.instagram.com/plenarycouncil2020) [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)





### Preparing Yourself

The moment you begin sharing information about the Plenary Council, people will naturally ask you questions. You do not have to be the knower of all information, but it will help your confidence levels if you do have a good handle on the basics.

- Step 1 Visit the Plenary Council website and explore:  
[www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)
- Step 2 Read the Theology page:  
<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/pages/about-us/theology/>
- Step 3 Read the FAQs page:  
<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/frequently-asked-questions/>
- Step 4 Watch the Plenary Council Videos:  
<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/watch/>
- Step 5 Subscribe to the Plenary Council e-newsletter: **PlenaryPost**  
(There is a pop-up box which will appear when you log onto the webpage)

### Working Together, Finding a Team

Bringing a few people together can help to get things moving a little more quickly than doing things by yourself. Think about who is in your community and contact the leaders. Invite them to help you to get the local community involved in the Plenary Council. Here are some suggestions for a small parish community working group to collaborate together:

- ✦ Parish pastoral secretary
- ✦ Parish pastoral associate
- ✦ Youth leader / young couple
- ✦ Parish pastoral council member(s) and/or finance council members
- ✦ Primary school Principal
- ✦ Secondary school Principal / Year Coordinator / Religious Education Coordinator
- ✦ Local aged care / community services representative
- ✦ Local councillor / community leader



### Engaging people through the Parish Mass

Below is a week-by-week activity guide for communicating the Plenary Council at Mass on Sundays. You are welcome to use some or all of this and you're encouraged to add your own ideas.

#### Week1 Announcing the Plenary Council 2020

In the first week, the aim is to simply introduce the Plenary Council and let your community know that it is an important event for the future of the Church in Australia happening in 2020. The main message is that every person's voice is important and over the coming weeks we will learn more about it and importantly how everyone can be involved.

- ✦ Play the Plenary Council promotional video (If you do not have audio-visual equipment, simply communicate the same message as the video, and encourage people to watch it at home). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exNXH2YcB8Y&feature=youtu.be>
- ✦ Intercessory Prayers, Week 1 (*Appendix 1*).
- ✦ During the Mass, pray the Plenary Council Prayer together.
- ✦ Homily Notes / Announcements, Week 1 (*Appendix 2*).
- ✦ Parish Bulletin Notice, Week 1 (*Appendix 3*).

#### Week2 Learning a little bit more...

In the second week, the aim is to introduce a little more of the "nuts and bolts" information to the community and promote the website. Importantly, encourage people to sign up to the e-newsletter **PlenaryPost** to stay up to date, and 'Like' the [Plenary Council Facebook page](#).

- ✦ Play the video from Archbishop Timothy Costelloe:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRVY7\\_uYCM4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRVY7_uYCM4)
- ✦ Intercessory Prayers, Week 2 (*Appendix 1*).
- ✦ During the Mass, pray the Plenary Council Prayer together.
- ✦ Homily Notes / Announcements, Week 2 (*Appendix 2*).
- ✦ Parish Bulletin Notice, Week 2 (*Appendix 3*).





### Parish Action Idea: Food and Friendship Evening

For those people in the parish who want to know more information and want to learn about the Plenary Council together, you can host an information evening during the week.

You can invite people to bring a plate and eat together while you play the video recorded by the facilitator for the Plenary Council, Lana Turvey-Collins. For further information, you can read through the FAQs on the website together and talk about what this could mean for you as a parish community. You can also list any additional questions you have as a group and email them through to your local diocesan working group or the facilitation team at [plenary.council@catholic.org.au](mailto:plenary.council@catholic.org.au).

### Week3 You're invited to host/join a small group.

In the third week, the aim is to promote the *Listening and Dialogue Encounter* and invite people to form small groups (similar to Lenten groups). This is so that people create time and space to consider the question: "What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?"

You might like to schedule some times and locations in advance for when Plenary Council listening and dialogue groups will meet each week for the next 4-6 weeks.

Alternatively, you can make the invitation this week for hosts, and put together a list of times and locations next week, which then parishioners and others can choose to join.

- ✦ Play the video from Archbishop Timothy Costelloe (repeat): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRVY7\\_uYCM4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRVY7_uYCM4)
- ✦ Intercessory Prayers, Week 3 (*Appendix 1*).
- ✦ During the Mass, pray the Plenary Council Prayer together.
- ✦ Homily Notes / Announcements, Week 3 (*Appendix 2*).
- ✦ Parish Bulletin Notice, Week 3 (*Appendix 3*).



### Week4-6 Get involved – it's not too late!

In the fourth week, the aim is to continue promoting the *Listening and Dialogue Encounter* and invite people to create time and space in small groups to consider the question: "What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?"

For those people who have begun a small group, encourage them in their journey.

For those who want to join a small group, find them a place in a group that has just begun or encourage them to host a small group of their own.

- ✦ Intercessory Prayers, Week 4-6 (*Appendix 1*).
- ✦ During the Mass, pray the Plenary Council Prayer together.
- ✦ Homily Notes / Announcements, Week 4-6 (*Appendix 2*).
- ✦ Parish Bulletin Notice, Week 4-6 (*Appendix 3*).



### Week7 Sharing the Story

In the seventh week, the aim is to include those in your congregation who are not part of a small group. During the Mass, you could invite two people to share about their experience of the small groups and tell the congregation some of the topics that their small group has been discussing. This type of testimony can be followed by an invitation for people to create time and space at home in the coming week to consider the question: "What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?" and invite them to complete their response online.

- ✦ Play the sketch video explaining the three-stage process. This will detail how each person's response will help to develop the agenda for the Plenary Council.
- ✦ Intercessory Prayers, Week 7 (*Appendix 1*).
- ✦ During the Mass, pray the Plenary Council Prayer together.
- ✦ Homily Notes / Announcements, Week 7 (*Appendix 2*).
- ✦ Parish Bulletin Notice, Week 7 (*Appendix 3*).

Your voice is needed.  
The agenda for the Plenary Council will be developed from your stories of faith and the





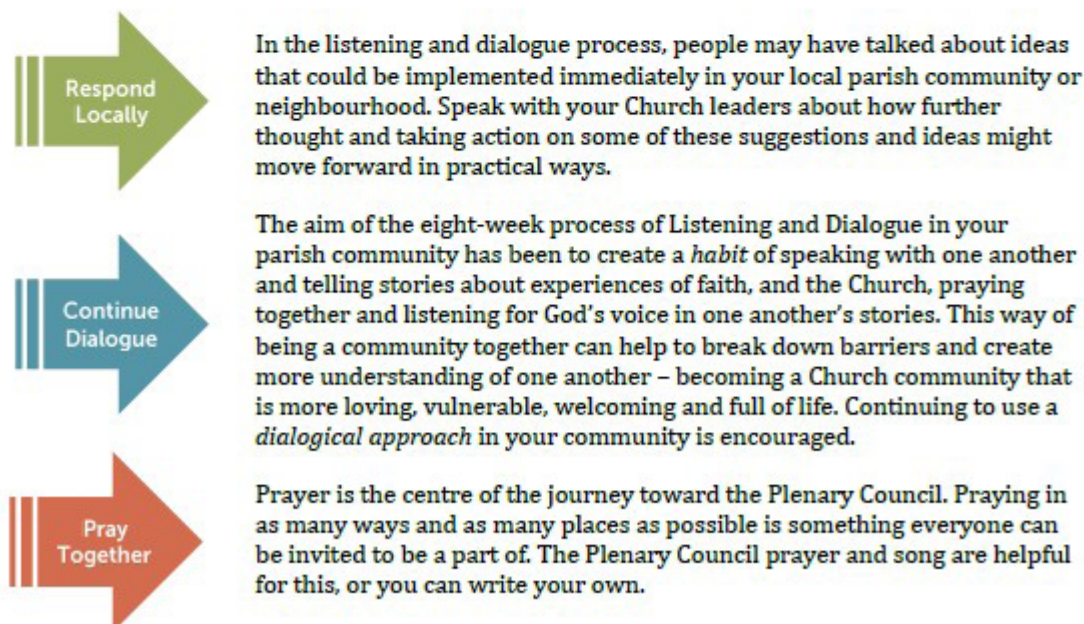
## Week 8 Continue the Habit of Dialogue

In the eighth week, the aim is to affirm that the voice from the people in your parish and neighbourhood community is important and has been heard. In the dialogue and reflection, together you have responded to the question: *"What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?"* and your responses have helped to build and shape the Plenary Council agenda.

- ✦ Intercessory Prayers, Week 8 (Appendix 1).
- ✦ During the Mass, pray the Plenary Council Prayer together.
- ✦ Homily Notes / Announcements, Week 8 (Appendix 2).
- ✦ Parish Bulletin Notice, Week 8 (Appendix 3).

Together, we are listening to God by listening to one another.

## After the eight-week cycle: What now? Next Steps...



## Activating Your Parish Community: Hints, Tips and Ideas

Below are some ideas to make it as easy as possible for people in your community to contribute to the Plenary Council process – and, importantly, to ask others to do so.

If you have a small team helping to animate local activity for the Plenary Council, you can brainstorm with these ideas and share the workload. Also, as time passes, you might have new ideas and you can invite others to take on some responsibilities and contribute their gifts to the process.

- ✦ Every week, between now and Ash Wednesday 2019, put a **notice in your parish bulletin** about the Plenary Council. It can be the same invitation reprinted each week, or you could ask someone to be creative and allocate this responsibility to them.
- ✦ Print the Plenary Council prayer onto **posters** and put them up around the church, the parish office, in the school staffroom, office and classrooms and the parish hall.
- ✦ **Print copies of the Listening and Dialogue Encounter** and leave them in your church, in the school staffroom and in the parish office. Add an invitation note: Please take one home – Your voice is needed!
- ✦ Every week, **pray for the Plenary Council** in the Intercessory Prayers and by praying the Plenary Council prayer together. It is essential that our listening, dialogue and discernment is grounded in prayer – this is the most important action that everyone can help with!
- ✦ Send the Plenary Council **prayer cards** to all parishioners, give them to all staff and students at the school and ask them to pray. Also place them in the pews at the Church.
- ✦ Invite your music ministry (particularly your youth music ministry) to **learn the Plenary Council song: "Listen"**. Over a number of weeks, teach it to your congregation and join together in song.
- ✦ Invite your parish small groups to share from their Listening and Dialogue experiences.
- ✦ Join together with the school or neighbouring parishes and **host some Listening and Dialogue Encounters**. These can be open invitation – so that those who are in small groups can come along, but so too can parents from the schools, members from the community and anyone who might be associated with the Catholic Church in your local neighbourhood. Contact your Diocesan Working Group for support.





### Appendix1 Intercessory Prayers

- Week 1** For the Plenary Council: As we begin our parish journey, Lord, grant us the courage to speak boldly and the ability to listen humbly and always with a heart open to what the Spirit wants for the Church. Lord hear us.
- Week 2** For the Plenary Council: Lord, we pray that you accompany us on this pathway and grant that the preparation and celebration of the Plenary Council may renew the Church and make it humbler and more hopeful and beautiful. Lord hear us.
- Week 3** For the Plenary Council: As we commence our Listening and Dialogue small groups, help us to become a synodal Church that listens, and realises that listening "is more than simply hearing". We pray that we listen deeply to one another and that the stories of our faith and the Church transform our hearts. Lord hear us.
- Week 4** For the Plenary Council: In our Listening and Dialogue, give us wisdom so that we may each profoundly answer the question, "What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?" Help us to put aside our own egos and issues to hear God's voice as we try to "listen to what the Spirit is saying". Lord hear us.
- Week 5** For the Plenary Council: Lord, encourage and strengthen us when our dialogue gets messy and we cannot see where the Spirit is leading us. May we come to appreciate that this is often the way the Spirit works. Lord hear us.
- Week 6** For the Plenary Council: Lord, may we appreciate that listening means being able to share questions and doubts, to journey side by side, to banish all claims to absolute power and to put our abilities and gifts at the service of the common good. Lord hear us.
- Week 7** For the Plenary Council: Lord, as we continue to prepare for our Plenary Council, help us to reach out beyond ourselves to engage the voices of others: young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the poor, the unemployed, the LGBT community, and those who are disillusioned or have been hurt by the Church. Lord hear us.
- Week 8** For the Plenary Council: As we come together as a parish community to respond, Jesus, give us more profound faith, greater courage, deeper spirituality and the ability to discern. Lord hear us.



### Appendix2 Homily Notes / Announcements

The notes below can either be woven into the homily during the Mass and linked to the readings of the day. Alternatively, they can be a few points for announcements either before or after the liturgy.

#### Week1

- ✦ The Plenary Council is a gathering of the Church in Australia to take stock of where we are and work to understand the context and society around us. It provides an opportunity for us to consider how we can be the presence and witness of Jesus amidst contemporary Australian society and discern the future God is calling us to as a Church.
- ✦ The Plenary Council will be held in two sessions: the first in October 2020 in Adelaide, the second in May 2021 in Sydney. Approximately 250 people will be delegates attending the Plenary Council sessions.
- ✦ The agenda for the Plenary Council will be developed from the "sense of faith" amongst the people of God in Australia. In the next couple of weeks as a parish, we will learn more about how we can make a contribution and also invite others to do so.

#### Week2

- ✦ The Plenary Council is held in three stages: preparation, celebration and implementation. Preparation is from now until the first session of the Council. Celebration of the Council will be the two sessions being held in October 2020 in Adelaide and in May 2021 in Sydney. Implementation is the ongoing life of the Church and her people after the Plenary Council session.
- ✦ Preparation for the Plenary Council begins with *open Listening and Dialogue*. It is the first step to preparing the agenda for the Plenary Council. We will explore this in more detail next week.
- ✦ All people connected with the Catholic Church are invited to reflect on the question: "What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?"
- ✦ Next week in our parish we will commence small groups for the Listening and Dialogue Encounters. These will function in a similar way to Lenten groups. If you would like to initiate a group or be part of a group, please register your details with the parish office.





### Week3

- ✦ The Plenary Council in 2020 is about the future of the Church. To prepare, we all are invited to reflect on the question: *"What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?"*
- ✦ This week, in our parish community, we will commence small groups – like Lenten groups, but this time we are gathering to pray, talk and listen to one another about our experiences of faith and the Church. It's a simple experience. There is a guide to help you and over a number of weeks, your group can choose the topics you wish to focus on.
- ✦ Everyone is invited to speak freely and honestly, sharing from your heart. Pope Francis speaks of our Church being a *synodal* Church – a listening Church – and in this process of Listening and Dialogue, we are called to listen to one another, and in doing this try to listen to God. For it is in encountering one another that we encounter Jesus.

### Week4-6

#### Excerpts from Theology page on the Plenary Council website

During these weeks, small groups will be forming, beginning to discuss various topics and experiences of their faith and the Church. Some points below provide an introduction to the theological perspective of the preparation toward the Plenary Council, in order to accompany the practical experience of listening and dialogue.

- ✦ The Scripture reference for the Plenary Council 2020 is "Listen to what the Spirit is saying". It is a passage from the book of Revelation.
- ✦ Vatican II taught that the Church should be more dialogic and participatory in its processes, involving all the baptised in the Church. The Council teaches that the whole Church has been given the gift of divine revelation, as well as the gift to interpret it faithfully.
- ✦ Access to the Holy Spirit comes through a special gift that all people who are baptised have received at their Baptism when they are anointed with chrism. That gift is called "a sense for the faith" (*sensus fidei*). The whole Church together has this special gift, what is called "the faithful's sense of the faith" (*sensus fidelium*).
- ✦ Through this, Vatican II teaches, the Church is "infallible in believing". So, this "sense of the faithful" is a sacred conduit for finding out what God is asking of us in Australia at this present time.



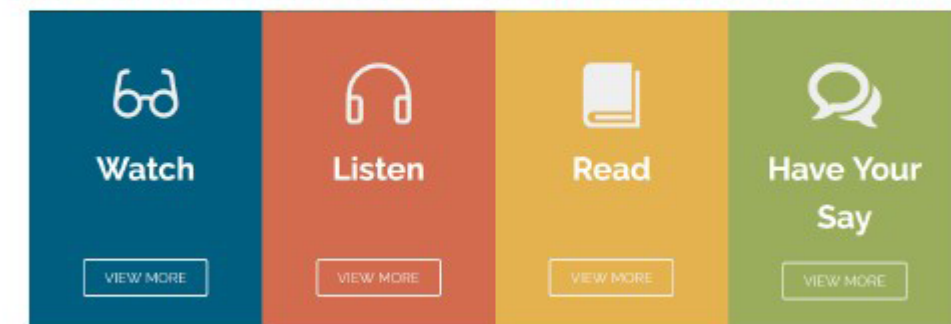
### Week7

- ✦ Over recent weeks, people in our parish community have been sharing stories with one another about their experiences of faith and the Church. As one person speaks about their experience, the others have listened. In this way, we have been exploring our "sense of the faith" amidst our own community.
- ✦ We would like to share some of the topics that people have been talking about with you all now... [Either have some people talk to the congregation about their experiences, alternatively list topics that have been shared with you].

### Week8

- ✦ This habit of Listening and Dialoguing with one another is sacred and we will continue this way of interacting with one another in our parish community going forward.
- ✦ Additionally, what you have shared about we can continue to explore in our own local neighbourhood. This is our community and we can work together respond here locally. [Share with the congregation any practical steps you are taking.]
- ✦ We have experienced this as a community in our parish, but this doesn't prevent you from reaching out to others in coming months and inviting them also to dialogue with you and respond. The Listening and Dialogue stage of preparation is open until Ash Wednesday 2019.
- ✦ Finally, the dialogue and listening that has happened in small groups is our community's voice. It is essential for this to be heard. If we have not already done so, please send in your responses – you can do this directly online to the Plenary Council, or you can email it to the parish and we will submit it online together.

The Plenary Council webpage has a wealth of resources available.







### Appendix3 Bulletin Notices

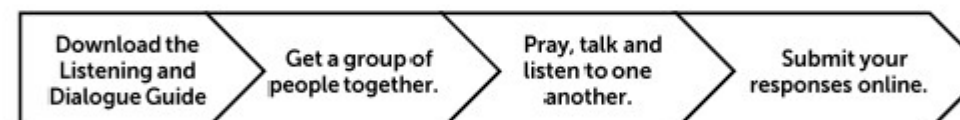
- Week1** The **Plenary Council 2020** is a gathering of the Church in Australia to make decisions for the future. Your voice is important. All people are invited to contribute to the Plenary Council agenda by sharing your experience of faith and of the Church. See [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au) for more information.
- Week2** Preparation for the Plenary Council 2020 begins with *open Listening and Dialogue*. It is the first step to preparing the agenda for the Plenary Council. Your experience of faith and the Church is important. Read about how you can #shareyourstory at [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au).
- Week3** You are invited to host or join a small group for Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue Encounters. Register your interest with the parish office on 07 xxx xxx. We are gathering to pray, talk and listen to one another about our experiences of faith, and the Church. Read more about this at [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)
- Week4-6** The Plenary Council agenda will be developed from the stories you share and the questions you raise. To join a small group for Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue, please contact the parish office. All people are welcome – come along, and bring a friend. Visit [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au) for more information.
- [Alternative] Your voice is needed! Join a small group for conversation about your experiences of faith, and the Church. Together, we are responding to the question: “*What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?*” Visit [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au) for more information.
- Week7** Over recent weeks, our parish community has been meeting in small groups for Listening and Dialogue sessions in order to contribute our voice to the Plenary Council 2020. Some of the topics that have been discussed in our community are: xxx, xxx, xxx and xxx. This week, we will send our responses in online. Thank you to all involved. Visit [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au) for more information.
- Week8** Thank you to everyone who participated in small groups and gave their voice to the Plenary Council 2020. If you want to #shareyourstory and contribute to the agenda, visit [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au) to read about getting involved. Subscribe to the Plenary Council e-newsletter **PlenaryPost** for the latest updates and news of what’s happening across Australia.



### Alternative Bulletin Graphics



### Listening and Dialogue in Small Groups:





## Appendix 3: Plenary Council Prayer Card

# Plenary Council Prayer

*Come, Holy Spirit of Pentecost.*

*Come, Holy Spirit of the great South Land.*

*O God, bless and unite all your people in Australia  
and guide us on the pilgrim way of the Plenary Council.*

*Give us the grace to see your face in one another  
and to recognise Jesus, our companion on the road.*

*Give us the courage to tell our stories  
and to speak boldly of your truth.*

*Give us ears to listen humbly to each other  
and a discerning heart to hear what you are saying.*

*Lead your Church into a hope-filled future,  
that we may live the joy of the Gospel.*

*Through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
bread for the journey from age to age.*

*Amen.*

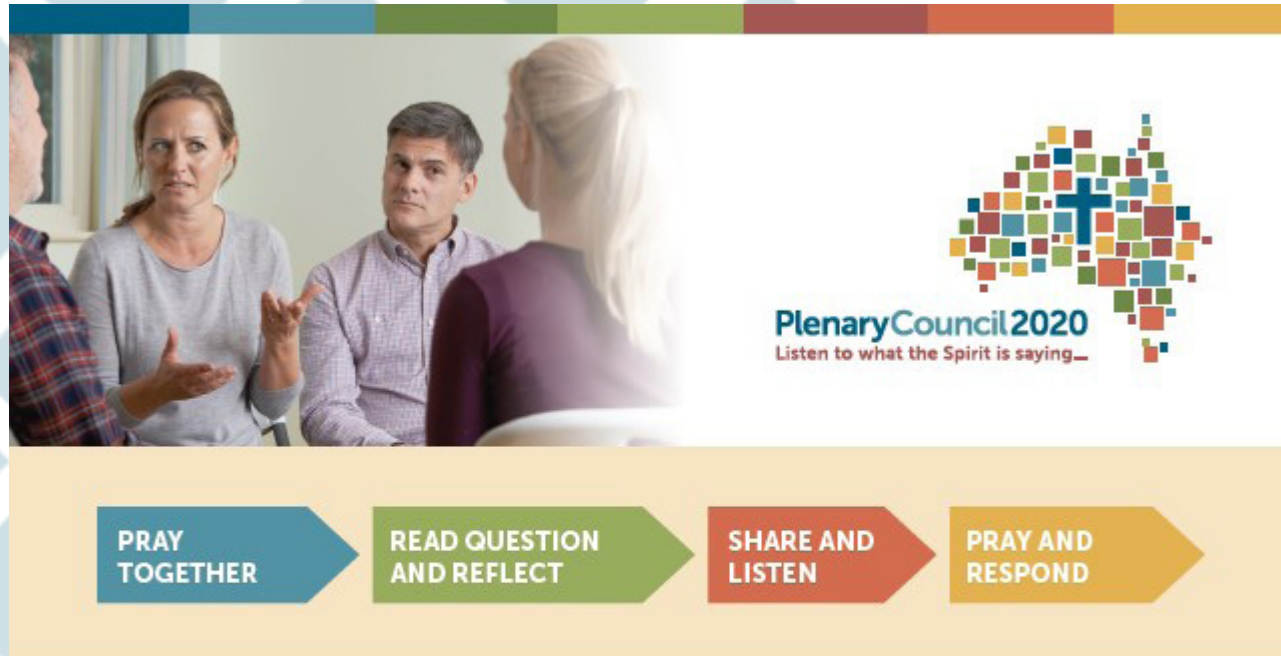
*Our Lady Help of Christians, pray for us.  
St Mary MacKillop, pray for us.*



**Plenary Council 2020**  
Listen to what the Spirit is saying...



## Appendix 4: Listening and Dialogue Guide for Adults



**Acknowledgement of Country:** We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of this great South land upon which we gather. We honour Elders past, present and future, and thank them for their sacrifice and stewardship.

### STEP 01 Pray Together

**You are invited to pray together.**

You might like to read scripture, you can use the words written below or just speak to God from your heart.

*Come, Holy Spirit of Pentecost.  
Come, Holy Spirit of the great South Land.*

*O God, bless and unite all your people in Australia  
and guide us on the pilgrim way of the Plenary Council.*

*Give us the grace to see your face in one another  
and to recognise Jesus, our companion on the road.*

*Give us the courage to tell our stories  
and to speak boldly of your truth.*

*Give us ears to listen humbly to each other  
and a discerning heart to hear what you are saying.*

*Lead your Church into a hope-filled future,  
that we may live the joy of the Gospel.*

*Through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
bread for the journey from age to age.*

*Amen.*

*Our Lady Help of Christians, pray for us.  
St Mary MacKillop, pray for us.*

### STEP 02 Read Question and Reflect

**What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?**

- Reflect on the question in silence.
- Write a list of all our thoughts and responses that come to mind.
- Share aloud with each other all of your thoughts and responses.
- Working together, choose **one** topic from all responses to focus on for Step 3.
- Our first topic for our listening and dialogue encounter is:

God is asking us to .....

### STEP 03 Share and Listen

You can repeat Step 3 for each topic on your list of responses over time. You may want to get together again in future weeks and months in order to continue to talk with one another using these steps.

#### REFLECT What have I experienced in this area?

In silence, reflect on your personal experience of faith, life and the Church related to the topic area you have chosen to dialogue about. You may want to write your thoughts down, or simply sit quietly with your thoughts.

#### SHARE AND LISTEN Tell a story of my experience in this area.

Take turns to share aloud with each other your personal experience of faith, life and the Church. When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart.

#### REFLECT How has another perspective influenced my own?

After each person has shared, in silence, reflect on how stories shared by other people have influenced your own perspective. You may want to write your thoughts down, or simply sit quietly with your thoughts.

#### SHARE How has another perspective influenced my own?

Show that you have listened deeply and openly to each other. Some phrases you may find helpful are: 'I feel your sharing has helped me to...' or 'From what you have shared with me, I now understand...'



## STEP 04 Pray and Respond

**PRAY** At the end of your first dialogue and listening encounter, you are invited to pray together. You can use the words below, or you might like to say a prayer of gratitude in your own words.

Creator God, we thank you for the encounter with one another today.  
We know that where two or three are gathered, you are in our midst.  
Thank you for being with us and for the courage to speak boldly and with passion, and the humility to listen with open hearts.  
We ask you to continue to walk with us, as we discover the pathway toward the future you are calling us to.  
Amen.

**RESPOND** Your voice is important to shaping the future of the Church. On the Plenary Council webpage, there is a link to the online form. By completing this, your contribution will help to shape the program for the Plenary Council. Your response is received directly by the Plenary Council team.

SHARE YOUR STORY, SUBMIT ONLINE

### The three questions for your submission are:

1. What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?
2. What questions do you have about the future of the Church for the Plenary Council to consider in 2020?
3. Please share a story of your experiences of your faith or the Church to give context to your responses to Q1 and Q2.

☐ Yes, I would like the Plenary Council team to contact me about sharing more details of my story. My contact details are:

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

MOBILE: \_\_\_\_\_



Thank you for contributing to the Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue process. Your online submission will help to develop the agenda for the Plenary Council in 2020.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION [f](#) [t](#) [i](#)

Plenary Council Team | PO Box 747 North Sydney NSW 2059 | E: [plenary.council@catholic.org.au](mailto:plenary.council@catholic.org.au) | [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)



## Appendix 5: Yarning Circle Reflection

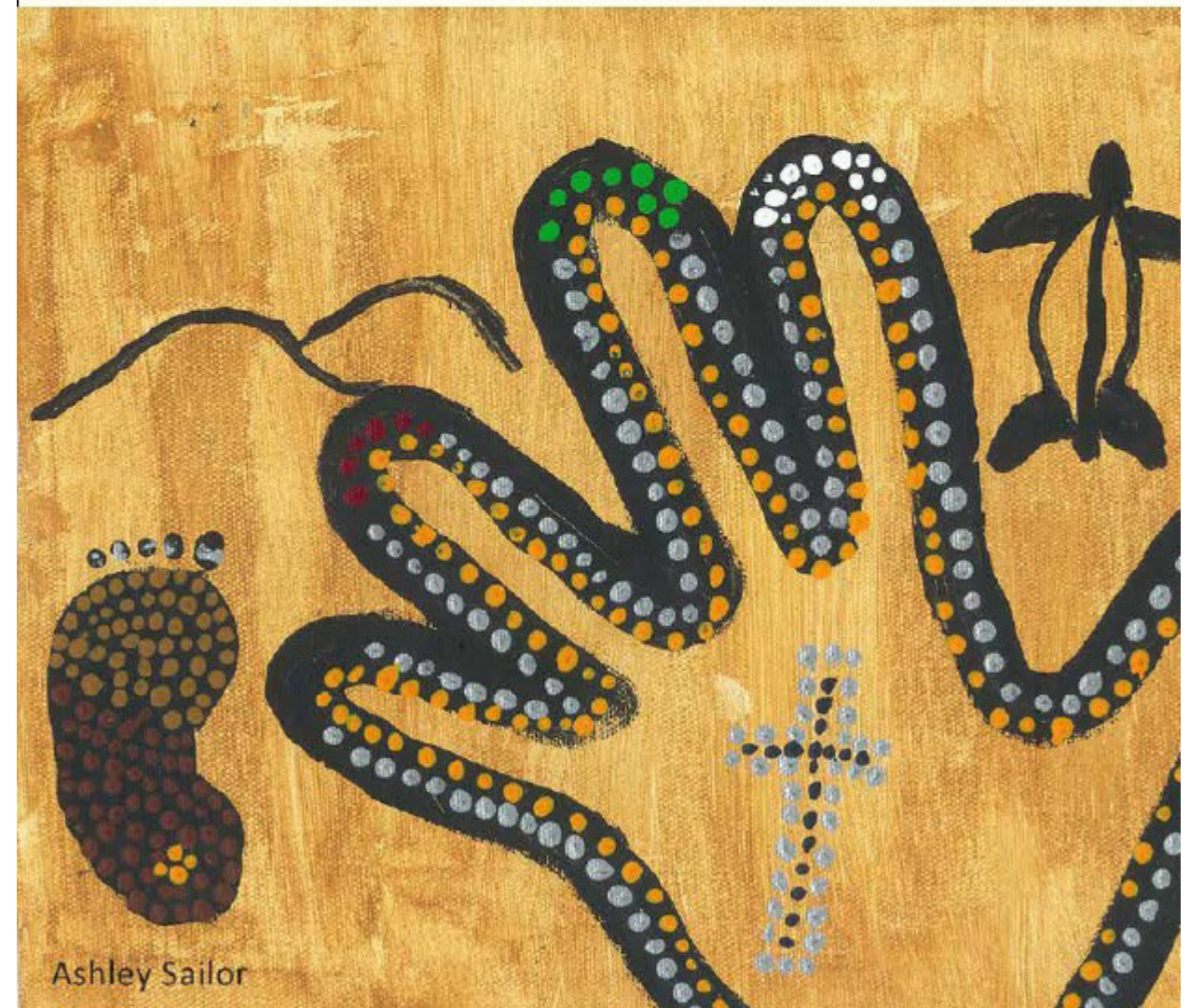
What is the Spirit asking of us and our Catholic Church?



A Yarning Circle reflection to assist communities in contributing to the Plenary Council Listening Process.



Yarning Circles are a very effective means of discussion and can also be used by non Indigenous Communities for Plenary consultations. The process used will be the same, however using reflections appropriate for the group.



Ashley Sailor

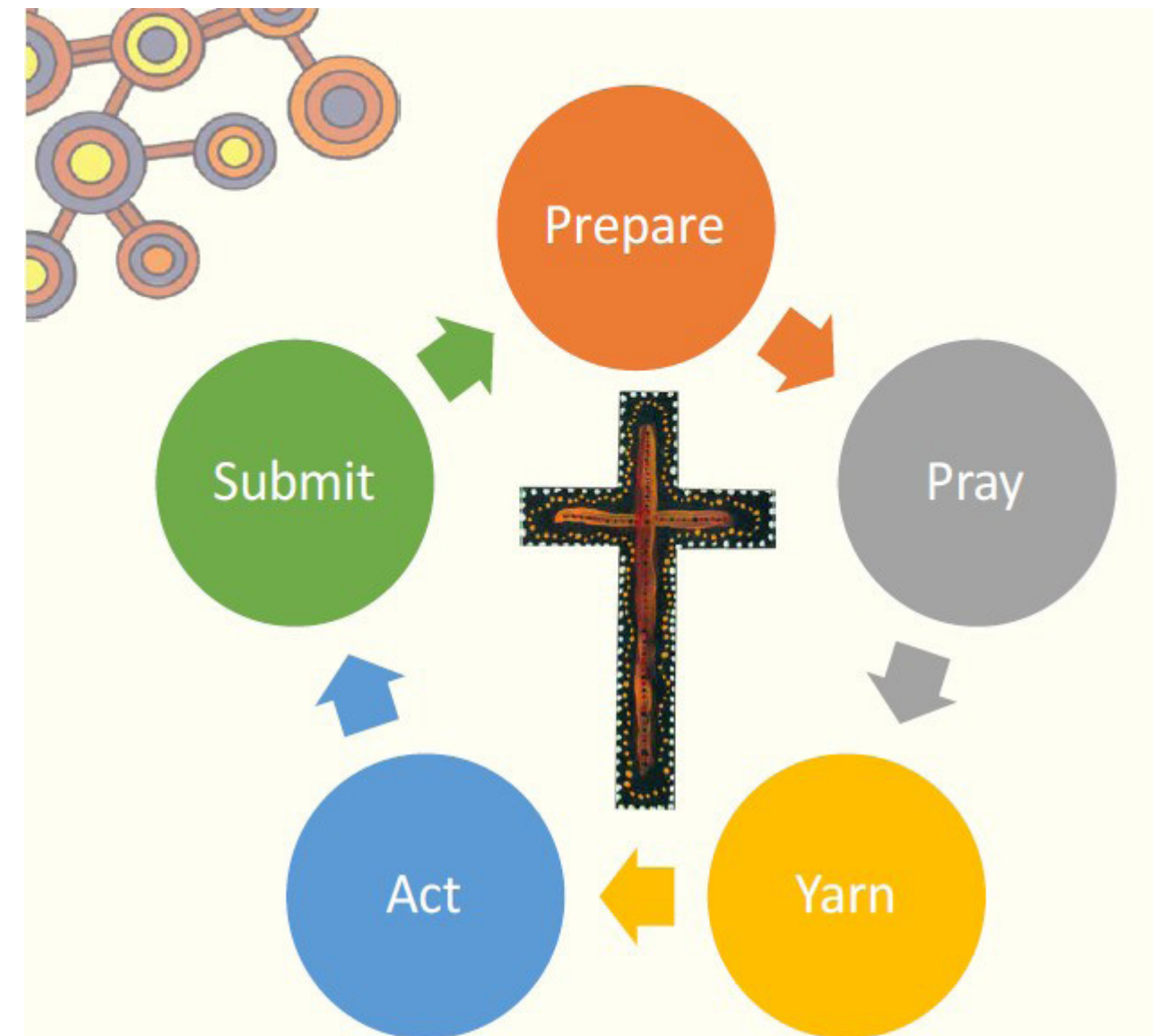


Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics now number over 130,000 and have much to offer the Church in Australia. The cultural gifts of faith, spirituality and the importance of family provide a unique perspective from which to share experiences, suggestions and wisdom to the Plenary Council.

We have called this process **What is the Spirit asking of us and our Catholic Church?** because we need to be part of the change and not leave it to others. It is our responsibility to make our voices heard, just as it is the responsibility of our Church to listen and respect our voice.

The Yarning Circle method has been used for this reflection because it is a proven and appropriate method of discussion and decision making within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Very similar methods have been used by other Indigenous people around the world for thousands of years.

By forming a yarning circle, the group is committing to creating a collective that is bigger than the sum of its parts. Each individual is an important member of the circle and every voice is important. Used correctly, yarning circles create an atmosphere of respect and a willingness to share with one another.



## PREPARE

**FIND** a quiet and special place. You can do this outside.

**FORM** a Yarning circle around a special symbol that represents both culture and Catholic faith. It could be a Cross, painting, photo or anything else that will centre the spirit of the group.

**Appoint** 1 or 2 people to act as scribes and a facilitator to note down your discussions and lead the session.



# PRAY

## Recite the Prayer of the Aboriginal people as a group.

Father of all, you gave us the Dreaming  
 You have spoken to us through our beliefs  
 You then made your love clear to us in the person of Jesus  
 We thank you for your care  
 You own us  
 You are our hope  
 Make us strong as we face the problems of change  
 We ask you to help the people of Australia to listen to us and respect  
 our culture  
 Make the knowledge of you grow strong in all people  
 So that you can be at home in us and we can make a home for  
 everyone in our land.



Artist: Phylis Wilson

# Yarn

1. Form a circle with enough space between each participant.
2. Place your item or artifact in the middle of the circle and explain that the item is a symbol of both culture and the Church.
3. Explain that a yarnning circle is a method of discussion and decision making that has been used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for thousands of years and that all participants are equal.
4. All participants should place themselves in state of respectful deep listening and openness.
5. Begin the selected reflection using the suggested method on page 8
6. In silence, contemplate **What is the Spirit asking of us and our Catholic Church?** You do not need to set a specific time of silence as the Spirit takes time to move within us. Wait until everyone is ready to share before beginning the discussion.
7. The circle now examines their own experiences of the Church in light of the reflection.

These discussions might raise everyday issues that do not relate directly to the reflection however they emerge because of the mutual confidence that now exists in an atmosphere in the presence of God.

# Act

The facilitator to share what they have heard. **It is important that these words reflect the discussions and that all participants are satisfied.**

Together, decide how you want your input to be shared with the Plenary Council. There are no rules and your input can be in the form of:

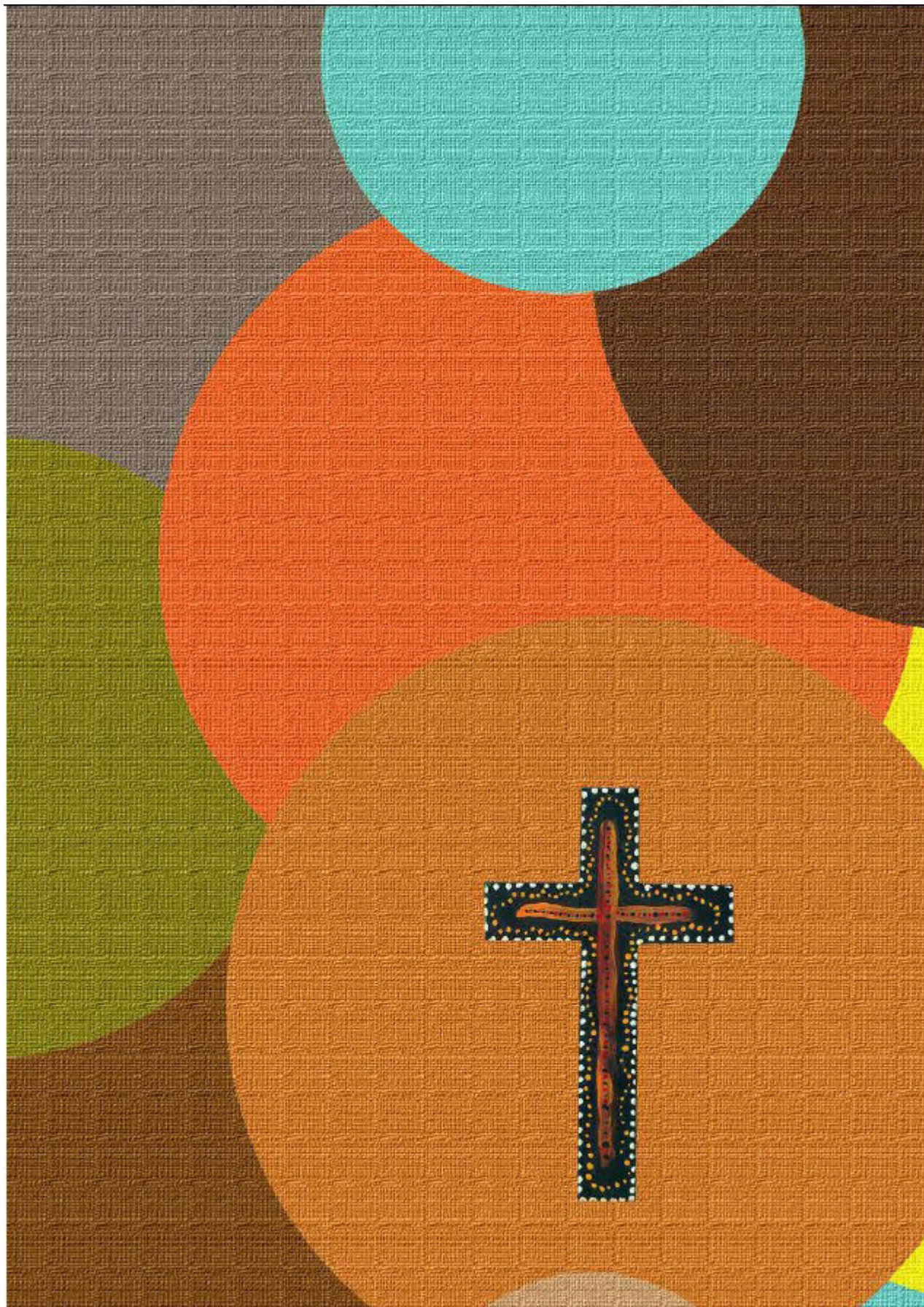
- o A painting
- o Written report
- o A prayer
- o A song
- o A video or audio recording
- o Anything else that represents your feelings and outcomes

# Submit

Submit online at [www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au) or mail to Plenary Council Team – PO Box 747 North Sydney NSW 2059

The team at NATSICC are happy to assist with your submission. Either call 08 8363 2963 or email [craig@natsicc.org.au](mailto:craig@natsicc.org.au)





# REFLECTIONS

Three reflection pieces have been provided. Two are included in this booklet. The third is an online reflection that can be accessed at [www.natsicc.org.au/2020plenary](http://www.natsicc.org.au/2020plenary)

You can use one of the three reflections per session, a combination of the three or (if time and energy allows) all three.

1. Read or view the reflection together
2. The Facilitator asks –  
**What is the Spirit asking of us and our Catholic Church?**

The reflection is read or viewed again.

**A Traditional Voice**  
Deacon Boniface Perdjert shares his vision of bringing together Church and Culture.



**Corinthians 12: 12-31**  
One of the most famous pictures of the unity of the Church ever written.

**Visual ONLINE reflection**  
This presentation uses St. John Paul II's words to nurture reflection.



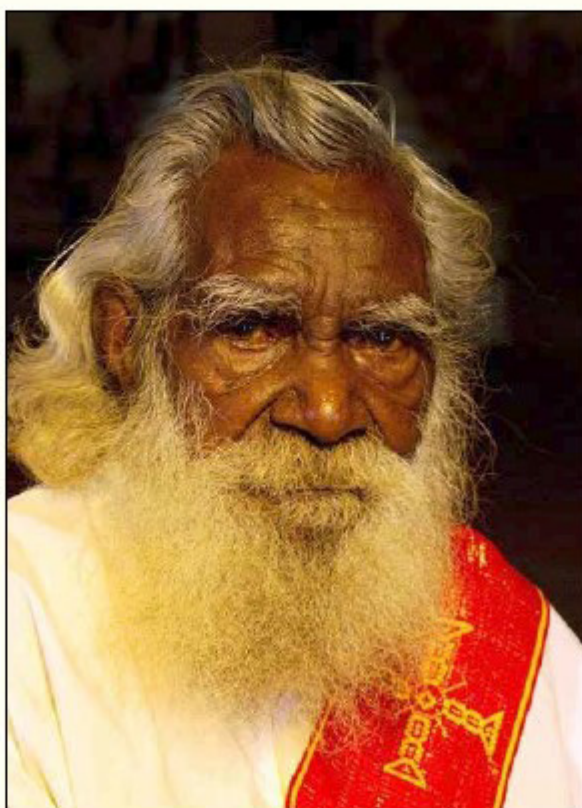
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER VIEWS ARE WARNED THAT THE PRESENTATION MAY CONTAIN IMAGES AND VOICES OF THOSE THAT HAVE PASSED.



## REFLECTION 1

### A TRADITIONAL VOICE

DEACON Boniface is senior elder of the Kardu Diminlin clan and Murrinhpatha language speaker and the traditional owner of the land on which the town of Wadeye (Port Keats) is built.

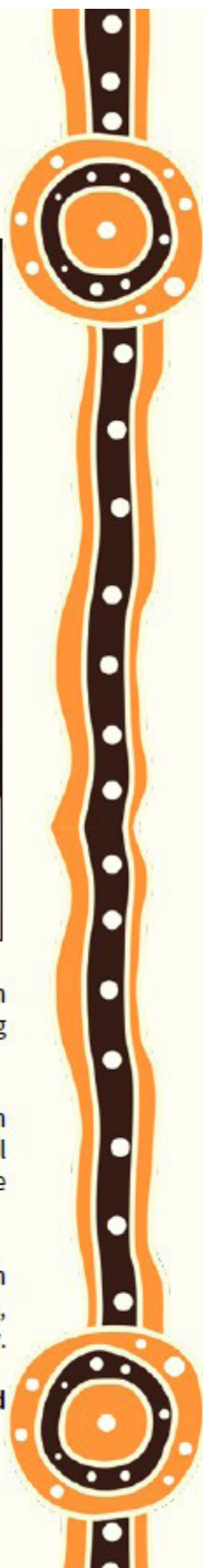


Let me tell you how important and necessary it is to proceed and strengthen our Culture in our Catholic Faith. I see remedy for what is going wrong coming from inspiration and the strength of the faith.

The faith will bring us together the faith will shelter us and let us listen to ourselves and to one another at the very deep level. The faith will encourage us, enlighten us and strengthen us to share and minister to one another. We belong to the faith, it will make us one family.

As I said earlier as a Deacon, it became my duty to bring the faith church and the culture together. I know Jesus did not come to destroy the Culture, he came to fulfil it. His spirit allows all to reflect in their own Cultural way.

What is good grows stronger and what is bad grows weaker and hopefully disappears so people of Culture can become strong.



## REFLECTION 2

### Scripture

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE BODY

COR. 12: 12-21

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!”

COMMENTARY (COMMUNITY BIBLE)

Facilitators may use this commentary as an additional tool to inspire discussion

We are one body in Jesus and must place our talents at the service of others.

A detailed comparison with the body helps us to understand what the Church is, showing at the same time how we must complement and respect each other.

We cannot have a true community unless each of us shares in its life placing our talents at the service of others. Even the most humble, poor and uneducated Christian may have riches of a moral or artistic order,

with which he/she is able to serve his/her brothers and sisters.

As soon as one is really committed to a Christian life the Spirit awakens in him new and sometimes unsuspected capabilities.

If we pay attention to the riches of our brothers and sisters and awaken in them the consciousness of their dignity and responsibility, we shall see a new resurgence in the Church, fruit of the Spirit.





## REFLECTION 3

### Online Reflection



#### What is the Spirit asking of us and our Catholic Church?

A visual reflection for use by communities for 2020 Plenary Council consultations



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers are advised that this presentation may contain the images and voices of those that have passed.

NATSICC has produced an online reflection for groups to use as a Yarning Circle reflection. The reflection uses imagery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics sharing gifts of culture with the Church. The paintings, celebrations and rituals included in the reflection depict the richness, colour and authenticity of spirit that Australia's First people contribute to the Australian Catholic Church.

On each slide, a quote from St John Paul II's address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Alice Springs (1986) is overlaid to encourage thought on how traditional ways can enrich the Church.

The reflection can be accessed at [www.natsicc.org.au/2020plenary](http://www.natsicc.org.au/2020plenary)

NATSICC has created a mailing list for communities to join so that they can stay updated on the 2020 Plenary Consultations. It is also an avenue for communities to share their thoughts on the Plenary, connect with other communities and to provide input directly to the Plenary Council.

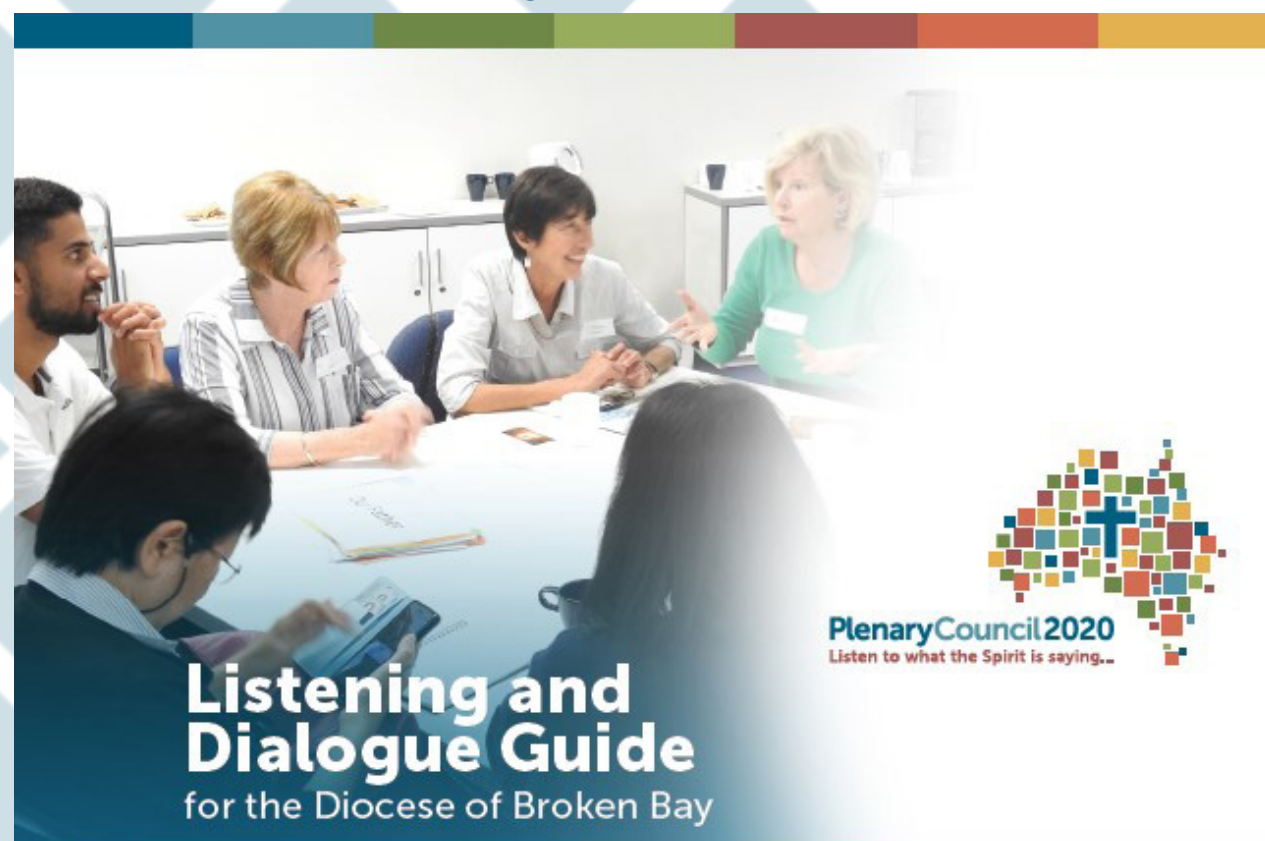
Email [admin@natsicc.org.au](mailto:admin@natsicc.org.au) to be added to the list.

### Community and Ministry Connect

Fostering a national network of Catholic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups



## Appendix 6: Sample Listening and Dialogue Guide - Broken Bay Diocese



### A FIVE STEP PROCESS:



#### STEP 01 Introduction (up to 10 minutes)

Welcome and thank you for sharing your voice towards Plenary Council 2020. Your Local Animator or facilitator will share a brief introduction to Plenary Council 2020, outline the process for your Listening and Dialogue Session, and invite you to break into small groups.

#### STEP 02 Pray Together (up to 10 minutes)

You are invited to pray together in your small group. You might like to read scripture, you can use the words written below or just speak to God from your heart.

*Come, Holy Spirit of Pentecost.  
Come, Holy Spirit of the great South Land.  
O God, bless and unite all your people in Australia  
and guide us on the pilgrim way of the Plenary Council.  
Give us the grace to see your face in one another  
and to recognise Jesus, our companion on the road.  
Give us the courage to tell our stories  
and to speak boldly of your truth.  
Give us ears to listen humbly to each other  
and a discerning heart to hear what you are saying.  
Lead your Church into a hope-filled future,  
that we may live the joy of the Gospel.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
bread for the journey from age to age. Amen.  
Our Lady Help of Christians, pray for us.  
St Mary MacKillop, pray for us.*

#### STEP 03 Read Question and Reflect (up to 20 minutes)

**What do you think God is asking  
of us in Australia at this time?**

- **Reflect on the question** in silence for 5 minutes.
- Then, **as individuals, write a list of all the responses to this question** that come to mind, writing each of your individual responses on separate post-it notes. When everyone has finished writing down their thoughts or ideas, place all of your post-it notes together in the middle of your table or group.
- **As a group, arrange these post-it notes** into general categories (e.g. putting all the responses related to 'liturgy' together, those related to 'clergy' together, and so on).
- Working together, **choose the topic** that generated the most responses in your group to focus on for the next step, Step 4.
- **Our topic for our Listening and Dialogue Session is:**

Remember that if your particular topic is not the one that generates the most responses in your group you may want to gather together again in future weeks and months to continue to talk with each other about alternative topics. If your topic is not chosen in this instance, the process that follows can be completed with other topics or themes in hand. You can also decide to submit your individual thoughts on your preferred topic directly to the Plenary Council website following the Listening and Dialogue Session (<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say>). See Step 5 for details on how to submit your insights directly.



## STEP 04 Share and Listen (up to 60 minutes)

### REFLECT What have I experienced in this area? (5 minutes)

In silence, reflect on your personal experience of faith, life and the Church **related to the topic area your group has chosen**. You may want to write your thoughts down, or simply sit quietly with your thoughts.

### SHARE AND LISTEN Tell a story of my experience in this area (40 minutes)

Now take turns to share aloud with each other your personal experience of faith, life and the Church. Make sure everyone in your group has at least one chance to tell their story. Also choose someone in your group to take general notes in the box provided below (bullet points will suffice) if you have not already done so. When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart.

*Our stories of our experiences of faith and the Church . . .*

### REFLECT How has another perspective influenced my own? (5 minutes)

After each person has shared, reflect in silence on how stories shared by other people in your group have influenced your own perspective. You may want to write your thoughts down, or simply sit quietly with your thoughts.

### SHARE How has another perspective influenced my own? (5 minutes)

Show that you have listened deeply and openly to each other. Some phrases you may find helpful are: 'I feel your sharing has helped me to...' or 'From what you have shared with me, I now understand...'

**PRAY** (5 minutes) At the end of your listening and sharing as a small group, you are invited to pray together and give thanks for your sharing with each other. You can use the prayer below, or you might like to pray a prayer of gratitude in your own words.

*Creator God, we thank you for the encounter with one another today.  
We know that where two or three are gathered, you are in our midst.  
Thank you for being with us and for the courage to speak boldly and with passion, and the humility to listen with open hearts.  
We ask you to continue to walk with us, as we discover the pathway toward the future you are calling us to.  
Amen.*

## STEP 05 Regather and Pray (up to 20 minutes)

Your Local Animator or facilitator will now regather all participants as one.

The nominated spokesperson of your small group will be invited to share their group's collective sense of 'What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?' It is important that all listen with an open and humble heart. Not every group has to share if they do not wish to.

Your Local Animator or facilitator will also provide instructions on how **your shared insights are now to be submitted** to the national Plenary Council website to ensure they shape the agenda for Plenary Council 2020, whether your small group leader submits on your behalf, every participant submits their own response, or the Local Animator or facilitator agrees to submit on behalf of all gathered participants. All submissions should be made to <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say>

**We thank you** for taking part in this Listening and Dialogue Session and giving your voice to Plenary Council 2020 and the future of the Catholic Church in Australia.

**For more information or support**, please contact your Local Animator, facilitator or community leader, or otherwise one of the contacts below. We are eager to support your participation and involvement in any way we can.

Parishes, Religious Orders, Movements, Migrant Communities (**Pina Bernard**)  
Email: [pina.bernard@bbcatholic.org.au](mailto:pina.bernard@bbcatholic.org.au)  
Phone: 8379 1627

Catholic Schools (**Anthony Maher**)  
Email: [anthony.maher1@dbb.catholic.edu.au](mailto:anthony.maher1@dbb.catholic.edu.au)  
Phone: 9847 0306

Youth Leaders (**Kelly Paget**)  
Email: [kelly.paget@bbcatholic.org.au](mailto:kelly.paget@bbcatholic.org.au)  
Phone: 8379 1633





## Appendix 7: Sample Plenary Council Facilitator's Guide - Broken Bay Diocese

### LOCAL ANIMATOR AND FACILITATOR NOTES for the Diocese of Broken Bay



Thank you for supporting the faith and hope of our Catholic community of Broken Bay. Your role as a Local Animator or facilitator in your local parish, school or faith community will enable those within your community or network to share their voice toward Plenary Council 2020. The Plenary Council gives us all an important opportunity to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church in Australia. By facilitating or coordinating dialogue in your local community, you will shape the agenda for the Plenary Council in dialogue with others.

#### PREPARATION

- 1 It is recommended that as a Local Animator or facilitator of dialogue that you **bring a few people together** to help plan for and organise your Listening and Dialogue Session/s. You do not have to undertake this process alone and can work beside others to bring such sessions to life. Assisting team members might include parish or school staff, ministry or service leaders in the community, people who are willing to offer hospitality at sessions, and others who may be eager to lead listening sessions in their own specific groups or context (e.g. a music ministry leader). The Plenary Council encourages this type of collaboration and 'synodality' within our local communities, that is, 'walking together' at the local level to bring about new life in the Church.
- 2 As an organising team, people will naturally ask you and others questions about the Plenary Council and you may have questions yourself. To **be as informed as possible about the Plenary Council** visit the official website <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au> where you can learn more about this national process, read and download the helpful Frequently Asked Questions page, and watch introductory videos so you can feel confident in leading dialogue at a local level.
- 3 As an organising team it is important that you **read through the Listening and Dialogue Guide** included within, so you can guide participants through the process. You can then plan when your participants need to move through the five steps involved. From experience, the ideal amount of time to dedicate to a Listening and Dialogue Session is 2 hours. However, if you are intending to use it with a smaller group, you can adjust the times suggested by the Guide (especially Steps 3, 4 and 5) to complete the process in 1 hour or so.

- 4 In your planning and in consultation with your parish priest, principal or local leader, your organising team might decide that you would like to run a Listening and Dialogue Session with a larger group (e.g. thirty parishioners or all of school or agency staff). This will require your leadership or that of a local facilitator. Alternatively, a parish or school community may prefer to ask specific and smaller groups of the community (e.g. the Parish Pastoral Council, ministry groups, senior teaching staff etc.) to hold their own listening sessions. In this case, you might simply provide these smaller groups with a basic explanation of the process and invite them to facilitate dialogue among themselves. It might be that communities decide to host a mix of large and small gatherings where dialogue can take place. Respecting your local situation or context, **you are free to decide how you would like to structure dialogue** in your local community. The important thing is that people have an opportunity to share their experience and insights towards the future of our Church.
- 5 Next, you can consider **when and where to host your session** (e.g. daytime or evening, week days or weekends), reserving your venue according to the commitments and activities of your people and with the intent of maximising participation.
- 6 Importantly, as an organising team, you will need to **decide how responses from your Listening and Dialogue Session/s will be formally submitted** to the Plenary Council website at <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say>. All submissions from our Diocese, and indeed across the country, are to be submitted to this one website. The formal submission of responses is an essential step if the experience and insights of your people are to shape the agenda of the Plenary Council itself.





Below are some suggestions on how you might organise and ensure a formal submission from your parish/school/faith community is made:

- The *Listening and Dialogue Guide* recommends inviting participants to break into small groups of between four to six people. Each of those small groups could choose **one person in their group** to submit on their behalf. This is an ideal way as this person can best sum up the insights of the conversation that was held in their small group;
- Alternatively, **every individual group member** or participant at the session could be invited to submit their own individual response following the Listening and Dialogue Session. This demands little of your time as the Local Animator or facilitator but may risk fewer formal submissions to the Plenary Council website being made following the session;
- As Local Animator or facilitator **you could collect all responses** from the session and submit these on behalf of all the gathered participants. This will demand some of your time and attention following the session, and the small group conversations may not be captured as accurately as you will not have been able to hear all that was shared. However, it may assist to ensure a number of formal submissions are in fact made to the Plenary Council website and so shape the Council agenda.

- 7 Once the above details are decided upon, you can then begin to **promote your Listening and Dialogue Sessions** to those within your community and those beyond who are also invited to share their experience of faith and the Church.

For parishes, there are **numerous ideas for promotion, prayers, homily notes, announcements and other support materials** readily available on the Plenary Council website at <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au> click 'Resources', 'Read' then 'Parish Guide' to access this material. Much of this material can also be used in schools and agencies. You can also draw from promotional ideas and practical suggestions that were shared for parishes and schools at the Local Animator training days held in the Diocese. Background on the Plenary Council and details of your listening session can be shared through parish Masses, bulletin notices, community noticeboards and the like in the weeks prior to the gathering/s. Of course, personal invitation is always the best way to invite people to participate.



- 8 As promotion of your Listening and Dialogue Session/s takes place over some weeks, you can begin to **assemble practical materials** for the gathering itself:

- ☐ Basic hospitality for the session/s (e.g. coffee, tea and juice on arrival, biscuits or fruit, table water, mints or lollies)
- ☐ Following a brief introduction of the Listening and Dialogue Session we recommend that you invite participants to break into small groups of four to six people. Given this, in setting up your room you could seat two groups of four at a table of eight for instance. If no tables are available, simply arrange your chairs in groups of four or six, whichever you prefer.
- ☐ Post-it notes (one pad for each small group of four or six)
- ☐ Pens (one pen per person)
- ☐ *Listening and Dialogue Guides* (one printed guide per person)
- ☐ Spare note paper should it be needed
- ☐ If holding your session/s in a large room, at least two microphones (one for the Local Animator or facilitator, and one to serve as a roving mic for comments and sharing)
- ☐ A laptop or computer, with an internet connection, projector and projector screen or white wall (to play an introductory clip on YouTube from the President of the Plenary Council Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB). If this equipment is available, you might check prior to the arrival of participants that you can play the YouTube video online at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVY7\\_uYCM4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVY7_uYCM4) (5:19 secs). If this equipment is not available, a script of Archbishop Timothy's talk is included at the back of this guide and can be read out to participants instead.
- ☐ A closing prayer. Note that the Plenary Council prayer is used at the beginning of the small group dialogue as you will see in the *Listening and Dialogue Guide*. You could repeat this prayer at the end, prepare an alternative prayer, or take up the prayer of your local parish, community or faith community to conclude the session.

With venue, dates and times, materials, promotion and helpers in place, you are now ready to facilitate your session using the *Listening and Dialogue Guide*!



## FOR LOCAL ANIMATORS AND FACILITATORS ONLY

# Listening and Dialogue Guide

for the Diocese of Broken Bay

## A FIVE STEP PROCESS:



## STEP 01 Introduction (up to 10 minutes)

Your Local Animator or facilitator will share a brief introduction to Plenary Council 2020, outline the process for your Listening and Dialogue Session, and invite you to break into small groups.

## LOCAL ANIMATOR OR FACILITATOR'S NOTE:

- **Introduce yourself** to participants, welcoming and thanking them for sharing their time and experience of faith and the Church toward Plenary Council 2020.
- **You can share** that "Plenary Council 2020 represents an extraordinary opportunity to discover and discern, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the future course for the Church in Australia. It is time to ask, "What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?" Everyone's experience of faith and the Church is unique and it is important that the Plenary Council hears responses from as many people as possible. We want to invite people in this parish/school/faith community to speak boldly, and also listen with an open and humble heart. Our community of Broken Bay wants to share its faith and aspirations with the wider Australian Church. Thank you for taking part in this journey of prayer, discernment and decision."
- **Then introduce and play**, if you wish, the video from the elected President of the Plenary Council, Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB. This provides a helpful introduction to the spirit and purpose of the Council. This clip is available on YouTube at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVY7\\_uYCM4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVY7_uYCM4) (5:19 secs). Otherwise, you can read the script of Archbishop Timothy's talk which is included at the back of this guide.

- **Explain** that the responses from this Listening and Dialogue Session will shape the agenda of the Plenary Council. This session is structured into five steps: an introduction, prayer, reflection, sharing and regathering.
- **Invite those gathered to now break into groups of four to six**, to pray, listen and dialogue together using their *Listening and Dialogue Guide* over the next 90 minutes or so. You can emphasise the importance of genuine listening to one another without judgement and to allow each person to share their experience and view. Also **invite each group to nominate a scribe** or someone to record the insights shared, and someone to later summarise and share the conversation with the wider group. This can be the same person or another member of the small group.

## STEP 02 Pray Together (up to 10 minutes)

You are invited to pray together in your small group. You might like to read scripture, you can use the words written below or just speak to God from your heart.

*Come, Holy Spirit of Pentecost.  
Come, Holy Spirit of the great South Land.*

*O God, bless and unite all your people in Australia  
and guide us on the pilgrim way of the Plenary Council.*

*Give us the grace to see your face in one another  
and to recognise Jesus, our companion on the road.*

*Give us the courage to tell our stories  
and to speak boldly of your truth.*

*Give us ears to listen humbly to each other  
and a discerning heart to hear what you are saying.*

*Lead your Church into a hope-filled future,  
that we may live the joy of the Gospel.*

*Through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
bread for the journey from age to age.*

*Amen.*

*Our Lady Help of Christians, pray for us.  
St Mary MacKillop, pray for us.*



### STEP 03 Read Question and Reflect (up to 20 minutes)

**What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?**

- **Reflect on the question** in silence for 5 minutes.
- Then, **as individuals**, write a list of all the responses to this question that come to mind, writing each of your individual responses on separate post-it notes. When everyone has finished writing down their thoughts or ideas, place all of your post-it notes together in the middle of your table or group.
- **As a group**, arrange these post-it notes into general categories (e.g. putting all the responses related to 'liturgy' together, those related to 'clergy' together, and so on).
- Working together, **choose the topic** that generated the most responses in your group to focus on for the next step, Step 4.
- **Our topic for our Listening and Dialogue Session is:**

*Remember that if your particular topic is not the one that generates the most responses in your group you may want to gather together again in future weeks and months to continue to talk with each other about alternative topics. If your topic is not chosen in this instance, the process that follows can be completed with other topics or themes in hand. You can also decide to submit your individual thoughts on your preferred topic directly to the Plenary Council website following the Listening and Dialogue Session (<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say>). See Step 5 for details on how to submit your insights directly.*

#### LOCAL ANIMATOR OR FACILITATOR'S NOTE:

**After 20 minutes or so**, you can invite participants to finalise their topic of listening and discussion and move on to Step 4 ('Share and Listen') if they have not already done so.

### STEP 04 Share and Listen (up to 60 minutes)

#### REFLECT What have I experienced in this area? (5 minutes)

In silence, reflect on your personal experience of faith, life and the Church **related to the topic area your group has chosen**. You may want to write your thoughts down, or simply sit quietly with your thoughts.

#### SHARE AND LISTEN Tell a story of my experience in this area (40 minutes)

Now take turns to share aloud with each other your personal experience of faith, life and the Church. Make sure everyone in your group has at least one chance to tell their story. Also choose someone in your group to take general notes in the box provided below (bullet points will suffice) if you have not already done so. When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart.

*Our stories of our experiences of faith and the Church . . .*

#### REFLECT How has another perspective influenced my own? (5 minutes)

After each person has shared, reflect in silence on how stories shared by other people in your group have influenced your own perspective. You may want to write your thoughts down, or simply sit quietly with your thoughts.

#### SHARE How has another perspective influenced my own? (5 minutes)

Show that you have listened deeply and openly to each other. Some phrases you may find helpful are: 'I feel your sharing has helped me to...' or 'From what you have shared with me, I now understand...'

**PRAY** (5 minutes) At the end of your **listening and sharing as a small group**, you are invited to pray together and give thanks for your sharing with each other. You can use the prayer below, or you might like to pray a prayer of gratitude in your own words.

*Creator God, we thank you for the encounter with one another today.  
We know that where two or three are gathered, you are in our midst.  
Thank you for being with us and for the courage to speak boldly and with passion, and the humility to listen with open hearts.  
We ask you to continue to walk with us, as we discover the pathway toward the future you are calling us to.  
Amen.*



**LOCAL ANIMATOR OR FACILITATOR'S NOTE:**

Around 10 minutes prior to the full hour or the time dedicated to this part of the process ('Share and Listen') you can invite participants to begin to wrap up their small group discussion, giving themselves enough time to pray together in the last five minutes, and to nominate someone from their group to share a summary of their insights with the wider group if they have not already done so.

**STEP  
05****Regather and  
Pray**  
(up to 20 minutes)

Your Local Animator or facilitator will now regather all participants as one.

The nominated spokesperson of your small group will be invited to share their group's collective sense of 'What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?' It is important that all listen with an open and humble heart. Not every group has to share if they do not wish to.

Your Local Animator or facilitator will also provide instructions on how **your shared insights are now to be submitted** to the national Plenary Council website to ensure they shape the agenda for Plenary Council 2020, whether your small group leader submits on your behalf, every participant submits their own response, or the Local Animator or facilitator agrees to submit on behalf of all gathered participants. All submissions should be made to <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say>

**We thank you** for taking part in this Listening and Dialogue Session and giving your voice to the Plenary Council and the future of the Catholic Church in Australia.

**LOCAL ANIMATOR OR FACILITATOR'S NOTE:**

It is important for you to know that as a Local Animator or facilitator you do not have to have 'the answers' or solutions to participant's hopes or concerns. The role of facilitator is to simply allow the sharing to take place across the room, enabling participants to hear one another gently and respectfully.

- In this final part of the gathering, simply **invite small group leaders to share** what their own group's sense of 'What God is asking of us in Australia at this time?' Offer the opportunity to share what has been prayed about and discerned, leaving 5 minutes to speak to how responses of the session are to be formally submitted to the Plenary Council website.
- Once participants have shared and listened with the larger group, you can **then outline your submission process**.

*cont'd...*

**LOCAL ANIMATOR OR FACILITATOR'S NOTE:** *cont'd...*

As suggestions, every small group of four or six might choose one person in their group to submit on their behalf, or every group member might submit their own individual response, or your Local Animator/facilitator might collect all responses and submit these on behalf of participants. Whichever method is chosen by you and your organising team, **what is important is that submissions are made to <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say>** so that the experience and insights of those who gathered can shape the agenda of Plenary Council 2020.

Simply as information, the three questions asked on the website and which the submitter will respond to on the basis of the Listening and Dialogue Session/s, are:

- What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?
- What questions do you have about the future of the Church for the Plenary Council to consider in 2020? (You might consider what was not clear in conversation, or questions or uncertainties that emerged from the group).
- Do you have a story of your experience of faith, or the Church you would like to share?

Please note that when submitting to the Plenary Council website the submitter will be invited to keep a copy of their response for their own records. Those who submit a response can receive this copy by entering their email address when asked to during the submission process. **It is important that you do keep a copy of responses for yourself and your community.** This will enable you as a participant to share your group's insights with your own parish priest, school principal, parishioners and other Church leaders to take your ideas and thoughts forwards in community.

Indeed, following your submission to the Plenary Council website, we also invite you to share your group responses directly with our own Diocese via [plenarycouncil@bbcatholic.org.au](mailto:plenarycouncil@bbcatholic.org.au)

- The Local Animator, facilitator or local leader can **then offer a word of thanks** to all participants for giving their time and heart to the Plenary Council process through this Listening and Dialogue Session. This is followed by a closing prayer.

*\* Following your Listening and Dialogue Session, you will have many post-it notes left behind containing feedback from your community on topics that mattered to participants but may not have been discussed due to time. You or another member of your organising team might like to type up these additional responses and email them to [plenarycouncil@bbcatholic.org.au](mailto:plenarycouncil@bbcatholic.org.au) with your community name and date of dialogue. This is helpful material which will inform possible future directions and initiatives within our own Diocese of Broken Bay. Local Animators and facilitators are also free to share their experience of the dialogue itself and their personal thoughts on what has been shared.*

**Thank you for generously serving as a Local Animator or facilitator for your local community!**



**Message of the President of Plenary Council 2020, Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, on the importance of all people speaking and listening as the Plenary process begins across Australia.**

"As you may have heard, Pope Francis has just recently given his formal approval for the Catholic Church in Australia to hold a Plenary Council in 2020. At the same time, he has accepted the proposal from the Catholic bishops of Australia that I should take on the role of President of the Plenary Council. I am very grateful to the bishops and to Pope Francis for appointing me to this important task. I certainly want to add my voice to the voices of so many others in the Church in thanking Pope Francis for this approval.

Along with so many others I look forward to doing all I can to see that the promise of the Plenary Council is realised. We are facing many challenges in the Church in Australia at this time. The calling of the Plenary Council is a sign of hope for us all and also I think a call to action.

At the heart of this Plenary Council is our conviction that the time is right for all of us to ask a fundamental question: What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

At first glance it sounds like a simple enough question, but certainly the more I think about it the more challenging it becomes. How are we supposed to know what is in God's mind? I think the scripture quote we have chosen to guide us through the Plenary can help us here. It comes from the Book of Revelations: 'Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.'

There are two really important ideas here. The first is that God is speaking, in all kinds of ways. The second is that before everything else, our job is to listen. We will need to listen to many different voices, for God speaks in many different ways, some of them likely to surprise us.

First and foremost of course we will listen to God speaking to us through the Scriptures and especially the Gospels. We will listen to God speaking through the teachings, the life and the prayer of the Church. We will listen to God speaking through the realities of our own lives and the challenges of our own times. And we will also listen to God speaking to us through each other.

One of the ideas guiding us as we prepare for this Plenary is this – that one of the ways we listen to God is by listening to each other. Of course, we can't listen to each other if no one speaks. That is why it is so important that everyone, without exception, has the chance, and takes the opportunity, to speak from the heart about what he or she believes God is asking of us. No matter where you might find yourself in relation to the Church – deeply involved, only partially engaged, uncertain or disillusioned, or even angry, on the margins, or perhaps a friendly or critical outsider looking in – we need to hear from you for we are sure that God speaks to us all, and the Church needs to listen to everyone.

Listening can sometimes be a difficult or confronting thing. Sometimes when we listen really carefully, we hear things that surprise us or even unsettle us. We might have some

of our strongly held views challenged or even turned upside down. So, we are all going to need courage, and humility, and trust. Most of all we are going to need constantly to remind ourselves that what we are on about ultimately is discovering, as best we can, what God wants for the Church and from the Church – which is to say what God wants for us and from us.

The website for the Plenary Council is now live and is a great source of information about what the Plenary Council is all about, how you can be involved, and what progress is being made. So log on and have a look.

We have the Pope's formal approval, groups are being established around the country and momentum is building. So let's not be afraid. Let's not be cynical. Let's not be bystanders. Let's do our praying, do our reflecting, do our speaking and discussing, and do our listening. And let's trust that God, who has brought us to this point, will bring our hopes and all our efforts to a conclusion which really does reflect what the Spirit is saying to the Church in Australia at this time. So come and join us in this journey towards Plenary Council 2020."

**For more information or support**, please contact your Local Animator, facilitator or community leader, or otherwise one of the contacts below. We are eager to support your participation and involvement in any way we can.

Parishes, Religious Orders, Movements, Migrant Communities (**Pina Bernard**)  
Email: pina.bernard@bbcatholic.org.au  
Phone: 8379 1627

Catholic Schools (**Anthony Maher**)  
Email: anthony.maher1@dbb.catholic.edu.au  
Phone: 9847 0306

Youth Leaders (**Kelly Paget**)  
Email: kelly.paget@bbcatholic.org.au  
Phone: 8379 1633





## Appendix 8: Questionnaire for Submission to the Plenary Council 2020 (Print Version)



### Submission to the Plenary Council 2020

*(Print version of online submission – this completed form must be entered online prior to submission)*

Welcome to this stage of the process as we prepare for the Plenary Council 2020. Your response will be received as a submission to the Plenary Council. Your input is essential to enable us to 'listen to what the Spirit is saying' as we develop the agenda for the Council. Thank you for taking the time to contribute.

This questionnaire may take around 10 minutes to complete. If you do not want to answer a question, move onto the next one. If you would like to submit a more detailed response, you are invited to upload additional files at the end of the submission. This can include longer documents, artwork, images or music.

If you are aged under 13, please have a parent or guardian complete the submission on your behalf. If you are aged 13 to 15, you will be asked in the submission for a parent or guardian email address for consent.

You can make your submission anonymously or you can provide your details.

The Plenary Council team will receive submissions online until 6 March 2019.

If you encounter technical problems with this submission process, please send an email to: [pcresearch@catholic.org.au](mailto:pcresearch@catholic.org.au)

Have you participated in a 'Listening and Dialogue Encounter'?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

To learn more about the Listening and Dialogue Encounter, click this link:  
<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au>

Would you like to continue this submission without doing the Listening and Dialogue Encounter?

- ☐ Yes, I would like to continue
- ☐ No, I will come back at a later stage to enter a submission

How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

*Note: If you are aged 16-17, you may wish to discuss this questionnaire with your parent or guardian.*

*(If you are aged 13-15 years, you must obtain permission from a Parent or Guardian)*

#### Section for Parent or Guardian of young person aged 13-15 years

I give consent for my child to participate in this online questionnaire, and understand the information provided in the Information Section above. I agree that research data collected from my child for this project may not be published in any form that might enable my child to be identified.

Parent/Guardian name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of a group?

- ☐ As an individual
- ☐ As a group or organisation



**These next questions will help the Plenary Council team understand where you or your group are from.**

**What is your postcode, or the postcode of your organisation you are responding for?**

**Or, if you don't know your postcode, what is the suburb or town and state or territory you live in, or where is the organisation located? I.e. Richmond, Vic.**

*(If you are currently residing overseas, please name the country you are currently living in.)*

**Your response to the next few questions will help the Plenary Council team to develop the agenda for the Plenary Council 2020.**

**What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?** (500 word limit - if you would like to upload additional material, you can do so at the end of the submission)

**What questions do you have about the future of the Church in Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?** (500 word limit - if you would like to upload additional material, you can do so at the end of the submission)

**Would you like to share a story about your experience of faith or of the Church in Australia that has shaped you?** (500 word limit - if you would like to upload additional material, you can do so at the end of the submission)



The next question is about confidentiality and privacy. You can make this submission anonymously or you can provide your details.

(Please note that your details are protected by the Privacy Act 1988.)

Would you be open to the Plenary Council team contacting you about your submission?

- ☐ Yes, I would be happy to be contacted
- ☐ No thanks, I do not want to be contacted

Do you give permission for the Plenary Council to publish your de-identified submission online? For example, on the Plenary Council or a diocesan website or on social media. Please note that any identifying information about you will be removed prior to publication.

- ☐ Yes, I give my permission for it to be published
- ☐ No, I do not want my submission published

Do you give permission for the Plenary Council to send your de-identified submission to your diocese? Please note that any identifying information about you will be removed.

- ☐ Yes, I am happy for my submission to be sent to my diocese
- ☐ No, I do not want my submission sent to my diocese

If YES to any of the above, and you are submitting as an individual

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Your email address: \_\_\_\_\_

If YES to any of the above, and you are submitting on behalf of a group or organisation

Name of group or organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact person for group: \_\_\_\_\_

Your phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Your email address: \_\_\_\_\_

How many people, including you, are in your group / organisation? (If it's a large group, just an estimate will do.)

Approx. number of females: \_\_\_\_\_

Approx. number of males: \_\_\_\_\_

And approximately how many are in the various age groups? Just an estimate will do. (Note: please try to ensure that the total number for this question matches the total in the above question.)

Number aged under 20 years: \_\_\_\_\_

Number aged 20-29 years: \_\_\_\_\_

Number aged 30-49 years: \_\_\_\_\_

Number aged 50-69 years: \_\_\_\_\_

Number aged 70 or older: \_\_\_\_\_

Number - age unknown: \_\_\_\_\_

Total: \_\_\_\_\_



The final few questions are about you.

They will help us to understand the background of the submissions.

Are you:

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your religion? \_\_\_\_\_

If *Catholic*, which one of the following best describes you?

- ☐ I am Catholic and regularly attend Mass and other church activities
- ☐ I am Catholic and go to Mass and church activities sometimes
- ☐ I am Catholic, but I don't practise or get involved in anything
- ☐ I consider myself Catholic but I am not sure what to think about the Catholic faith
- ☐ Other (please describe in just a few words): \_\_\_\_\_

In which country were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

In which country was your mother born? *(Just leave it blank if you don't know.)*

\_\_\_\_\_

In which country was your Father born? *(Just leave it blank if you don't know.)*

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

### Additional Information *(optional)*

You can send documents, images and audio files along with your submission. These will need to be uploaded online on the website.

Would you like to provide additional information as part of your submission? If not, simply move to the next page. You may upload up to 3 files.

Please upload your files, one at a time, on the website. You can upload files in the following formats: .pdf, .jpg, .doc, .mp3 or .mp4.

For non-text files, it would be helpful if there is an additional explanatory document, particularly for artwork or music.

Thank you for responding and giving your voice to the Plenary Council.

You are invited to keep a copy of your response for your own records. By doing this, you will be able to continue to share locally with your faith community, parish priest, school principal and other community and Church leaders.

*Please note: Your email address will NOT be retained as part of your submission. Any attachments you uploaded will not be shown in your copy, but will have been received as part of your submission.*

Would you like a copy of your submission emailed to you?

*(Note: any files you may have uploaded will not be included in the copy.)*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please provide a valid email address, then click the '>' button: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your submission. It will enable us to 'listen to what the Spirit is saying' as we develop the agenda for the Plenary Council 2020.

Please submit by clicking the '>' button on the website.

Once submitted, you will be directed to the Plenary Council website.



## Appendix 9: Plenary Council Youth Guide Questionnaire



PRAY

TALK

REFLECT

SHARE



**Plenary Council 2020**  
Listen to what the Spirit is saying...


**STEP 01** Let's Pray!

We invite God into our conversation because this helps us to remember that our Church serves God's vision for the world. You can pray the Plenary Council Prayer, you can read scripture, or you can talk to God from your heart.

**STEP 02** Let's be Silent and Reflect!

Sit quietly for 3-5 minutes and think about your answers to this question: **What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?** While you are thinking, write down all the thoughts and ideas that you have in the box below.

*What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?*

**STEP 03** Let's Talk to each other!

Talk about all your thoughts and ideas with your group. Speak honestly, and when you listen, have an open mind and heart to really understand what the other person is saying.


**STEP 04** Let's Share our Stories!

As a group, choose one topic from all of your ideas that you want to focus on. Write it below.

*Our group thinks God is asking us to*

Now, take turns to share a story of your experience related to this topic. For example, if the topic you have chosen is "Help all people who are homeless in Australia." Then you could share a story about a time when you met a person who is homeless, tell their name and what you found out about them, and how they made you feel and why you

remember that person. You might also like to talk about what you think the Church could do to help to eliminate homelessness in Australia.

Make sure everyone in your group has at least one chance to tell their story. Choose one person in your group to take notes. Write down notes from each person's story in the box below:

*Our stories of our experiences of faith and the Church...*

Once everyone has spoken and you have written your notes down, sit together in your group in silence and think about the stories that have been shared.

**How do you feel about what other people said in your group?**





### STEP 05 Let's Think about the Future!

In your group, talk about what you would like the Church to be like in the future. Write down all your questions in the box below.

What questions do you have about the future of the Church in Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

### STEP 05 Let's Give Thanks!

Say this prayer together out loud:

*Creator God, we thank you for the encounter with one another today.*

*We know that where two or three are gathered, you are in our midst.*

*Thank you for being with us and for the courage to speak boldly and with passion, and the humility to listen with open hearts.*

*We ask you to continue to walk with us, as we discover the pathway toward the future you are calling us to.*

*Amen.*

Have Your Say, **SUBMIT ONLINE**

[plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)



Thank you for contributing to the Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue process. Your online submission will help to develop the agenda for the Plenary Council in 2020.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION [f](#) [t](#) [i](#)

Plenary Council Team | PO Box 747 North Sydney NSW 2059 | E: [plenary.council@catholic.org.au](mailto:plenary.council@catholic.org.au) | [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)



## Appendix 10: Plenary Council Christmas Card Campaign

# welcome

*Thank you for coming along to celebrate the birth of Jesus.  
We wish you a happy and holy Christmas!*



share the story  
shape the future



**At Christmastime**, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and our friends and families get together, share stories and make plans for the year ahead. In October 2020, the Catholic Church is gathering to make plans and decisions for the future. Your voice is needed to help create the agenda. What are your experiences of God in your life, your faith and the Church?

**What do you think God is asking of us in Australia?**

I think God is asking us to....



PO Box 747  
North Sydney  
NSW 2059



Put your completed  
card into the box  
at the back.



Scan QR  
code to  
respond  
online.

Visit [www.share-the-story.com](http://www.share-the-story.com) for more information.



@plenarycouncil

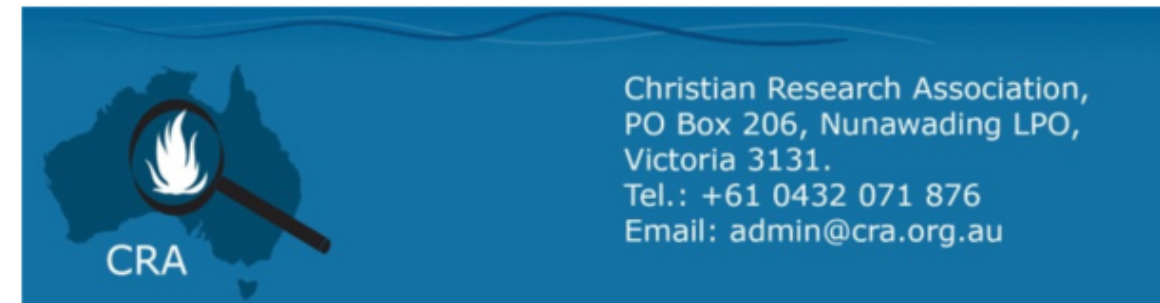


## Appendix 11: List of Alternate Questions

Below is a sample list of alternate questions that were collected during the Listening & Dialogue process. These were asked by parishes, dioceses and various groups, through the Christmas card campaign and other questionnaires.

1. Would you like to see the possibility of a married ministerial priesthood introduced?
2. Would you like to see more involvement of women in Church governance?
3. Locally are there any initiatives that you would like to see at the parish that you consider to be of value?
4. What are your experiences of God in your life, your faith and the Church?
5. What is meaningful about the Church as you know it?
6. What is your best experience of Church?
7. What needs to change?
8. What is your vision of Church in the future?
9. What are some of the big questions facing young people in Australia today?
10. If Jesus came to Australia today what would he want to see?
11. Why does faith matter to you?
12. If you were to belong to a community of faith, what would interest you in belonging?
13. What do you think God and young people hope for the future of the Church?
14. How the Church could better engage with the LGBTQI community in Australia?
15. What key issues do you feel the Church should engage in?
16. How can the Catholic Church better reflect and embody the values of a contemporary Australia?
17. 20% of responders feel women should be in key leadership roles within the Catholic Church. What is important to you?
18. How can the Catholic Church renew your trust?

## Appendix 12: Ethics Approval Letter



21 November 2018

Dr Trudy Dantis  
Director  
National Centre for Pastoral Research  
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference  
GPO Box 368  
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Dr Dantis,

I just wish to inform you formally that the CRA Human Research Ethics Committee considered the proposal 'Journey to Plenary Council' at its meeting on Monday 19th November and gave approval to the proposal.

The careful way in which the proposal had been prepared was noted - thank you.

It was also noted that the approval is only for the analysis and reporting stages, and did not cover the collection of data.

For legal reasons, it is important that the data be stored for 7 years. We assumed that this will be done in a secure and de-identified manner by the National Centre for Pastoral Research.

Best wishes for the research,

Philip Hughes  
Secretary  
Christian Research Association Human Research Ethics Committee



Appendix 13: Full List of Themes

A full list of the topics and themes that emerged from the analysis of the submissions made in Phase 1: Listening and Dialogue.

Love God, Love Neighbour

- Greater trust, faith and hope in God
- Greater focus on Jesus Christ
- Greater focus on the Word of God
- Remaining faithful to Church teaching
- Keeping the commandments
- Keeping the faith
- Being a witness in society
- Renewed call to holiness
- Care for neighbour
- Better faith formation

The Mass

- Attention to falling Mass attendance
- Better attention to all aspects of liturgy
- Inclusion of the divorced and remarried
- On the annulment process
- Communion for all
- Focus on the sacred
- Acknowledging Christ’s presence in the Eucharist
- Eucharistic Adoration
- Mass to be appealing to youth and children
- Greater attention to music
- Better homilies
- Different translation of the Mass
- Return to Traditional Latin Mass
- Return to traditional pre-Vatican II ways
- Better formation for liturgical ministries and sacramental programs
- Lay-led liturgies
- Greater access to Mass and Reconciliation, cultural Masses

Sacraments

- Greater emphasis on prayer and sacraments
- Ending celibacy / Allowing priests to marry
- Ordaining married men to be priests
- Ordination of women
- Welcoming back priests who have left to marry

- Better selection and formation of candidates to priesthood
- Concerns regarding overseas priests
- Greater focus on permanent deacons
- Better preparation and support for married couples
- Restoring the Third Rite of Reconciliation

Leadership and Church Governance

- Ending clericalism
- Servant leadership
- Greater role for women
- Greater involvement of the laity
- Greater leadership from bishops
- Greater leadership from priests
- New leadership and governance model
- New model of Church, diocese, parish
- Diocesan Pastoral Council
- Youth to be involved more
- Church adapting to multicultural reality
- Working together in unity
- Becoming a Vatican II church
- Greater recognition of Eastern Catholic Churches

Sexual Abuse and the Royal Commission

- Call to repentance for clergy sexual abuse
- Greater concern for victims and survivors
- Healing liturgies and public signs or acts of reparation
- More transparency and accountability regarding clergy sexual abuse
- More study on causes and implications of child sexual abuse
- Better implementation of Royal Commission recommendations
- Healing and moving beyond the clergy sexual abuse scandal
- Not treating all people or priests as paedophiles
- Care for paedophile priests

Social Justice and the Environment

- Greater inclusion of all
- Ending discrimination of LGBTI
- Fighting for human rights
- Living in peace and harmony
- Reducing margins between rich and poor
- Care for the environment
- Defending religious freedom



Defending the right to life  
Care for the family  
Putting Gospel values in action

**Outreach**

Greater connection with and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians  
Outreach to all the baptised  
Outreach to same-sex-attracted persons  
Outreach to the wider community  
Outreach to youth

**Evangelisation**

Sharing the faith with others  
Focus on ecumenism  
Focus on mission, being missionary disciples  
Evangelisation in and of the family  
Encouraging vocations  
Focus on the new evangelisation  
Church as a guide for Australian society  
Public prayers and peaceful processions

**More Listening**

Listening to one another more  
Listening to the Holy Spirit  
Listening to the laity

**Youth Ministry**

Better training and support for youth leaders  
Better youth faith formation  
Providing more youth facilities  
Establishing more youth programs

**Catholic Education in Schools**

Better teachers in Catholic schools  
Faith formation for parents  
More chaplains, youth ministers in Catholic schools  
Support for Catholic students in Catholic schools  
Teaching authentic Catholic faith

**Parishes**

Stronger parish communities  
Concerns for diminishing parish communities  
Formation of small Christian communities  
Parish Pastoral Council  
Baby boomer generation listening to young Catholics  
More welcoming parishes  
Special care of rural parishes  
Better interface between parish and school  
Pastoral planning  
Care for volunteers

**Bringing the Church into the 21st century**

Positive Church public relations  
Modernising Church teachings  
Allowing contraception and IVF  
Supporting same-sex marriage  
Supporting abortion and euthanasia  
Changing the concept of sin  
On liturgy and sacraments  
Marriages celebrated in parks and on beaches  
Radical change, a new order, inverted pyramid

**Better Plenary Council Process**

Sceptical about the Plenary Council process  
Exclusion of lay people from the decision-making roles of the Plenary Council  
Exclusion of women from the decision-making roles of the Plenary Council  
Plenary Council not necessary  
More frequent Plenary Councils in Australia



## Appendix 14: Complete List of Countries of Birth (Individual Participants only)

The table below is the full list of individual participants' countries of birth.

Australia	8,335	Ghana	1	Portugal	5
Afghanistan	6	Greece	2	Republic of Korea	2
Albania	2	Guyana	1	Russian Federation	1
Algeria	3	Hong Kong (S.A.R.)	32	Rwanda	1
Andorra	1	Hungary	11	Samoa	2
Angola	1	Iceland	1	Saudi Arabia	1
Antigua and Barbuda	3	India	172	Serbia	1
Argentina	6	Indonesia	36	Seychelles	1
Armenia	3	International	2	Singapore	36
Austria	16	Iraq	17	Slovakia	2
Azerbaijan	1	Ireland	102	Slovenia	3
Bahamas	2	Israel	1	South Africa	73
Bahrain	4	Italy	68	South Korea	4
Bangladesh	1	Japan	4	Spain	14
Barbados	1	Jordan	1	Sri Lanka	55
Belgium	3	Kazakhstan	1	Sudan	10
Belize	1	Kenya	12	Sweden	2
Bhutan	1	Kuwait	1	Switzerland	3
Bolivia	2	Latvia	2	Syrian Arab Republic	5
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	Lebanon	24	Timor-Leste	3
Botswana	4	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	1	Tonga	2
Brazil	19	Lithuania	3	Trinidad and Tobago	9
Brunei Darussalam	1	Madagascar	1	Uganda	5
Burkina Faso	2	Malaysia	85	United Arab Emirates	1
				United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	338
Cambodia	1	Maldives	1	United States of America	59
Canada	21	Malta	47	Uruguay	3
Chile	10	Mauritius	22	Uzbekistan	1
China	10	Mexico	7	Vanuatu	1
Colombia	10	Myanmar	7	Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic	5
Congo, Republic of the...	1	Nepal	2	Vietnam	20
Côte d'Ivoire	1	Netherlands	92	Zambia	2
Croatia	6	New Zealand	112	Zimbabwe	19
Czech Republic	4	Nicaragua	1		
Ecuador	4	Nigeria	7		
Egypt	16	North Korea	1		
El Salvador	11	Oman	1		
Eritrea	1	Pakistan	6		
Ethiopia	1	Palau	1		
Fiji	12	Papua New Guinea	8		
Finland	2	Peru	11		
France	11	Philippines	180		
Germany	38	Poland	28		

## Appendix 15: Snapshot Report 1 - Missionary and Evangelising



### Snapshot Report

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is:

# MISSIONARY AND EVANGELISING



MISSIONARY AND EVANGELISING

AS WE MOVE INTO THIS SECOND STAGE OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL JOURNEY, WE CONTINUE TO SEEK THE WISDOM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Beginning in July 2019, we are invited to reflect on Scripture, Church teaching and our contemporary situation in order to discern the answer to this question: How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is missionary and evangelising? The fruits of what is discerned during this time will help shape the agenda of the first session of Plenary Council in October 2020.

This National Theme for Discernment is inspired by the voices of the People of God who shared a passion for participating in the missionary nature of the Church and desire stronger support, involvement and formation among all the baptised who make up the Church. The data also identified the need to reach out and communicate more effectively and to find new ways of living and proclaiming the Gospel in Australia today. There was a call for the strengthening of leadership and ministries in parishes and schools, training to equip leaders for ministry, pastoral support for various groups within parish and faith communities, and a desire for a unified voice in engaging social issues such as life and religious freedom.

TOPICS: WHAT DID PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?

People spoke about a number of different topics in PHASE 1: LISTENING & DIALOGUE. A comprehensive report on all the voices of participants will be released on JULY 28, 2019.

Below are some of the topics that informed this particular theme, which was created through a combination of analysis, discernment and prayer.

- Affordable adult faith formation courses • Authentic faith teaching in Catholic schools • Be a witness in society • Better communication of what the Church does • Better faith formation • Better formation for liturgical ministries and sacramental programs • Better homilies • Better preparation and support for married couples • Better selection and formation of candidates to priesthood • Better teachers in Catholic schools • Better training and support for youth leaders • Better youth faith formation
  - Church should adapt to multicultural reality • Church to act as a guide for Australian society
- Concerns for diminishing parish communities • Defend religious freedom • Defend right-to-life issues
  - Encourage vocations • End celibacy, allow priests to be married • Establish more youth programs
  - Evangelisation in and of the family • Faith formation for parents • Fight for human rights issues
- Focus on mission, being missionary disciples • Focus on the new evangelisation • Greater connection with and inclusion of Indigenous Australians • Greater focus on Jesus Christ • Greater focus on permanent deacons • Greater focus on the Word of God • Greater leadership from Bishops • Greater leadership from priests • Greater role for women • Greater support for RCIA • Greater trust, faith and hope in God • Keep the commandments • Keep the faith • Listen to one another more • Listen to the Holy Spirit • More chaplains, youth ministers in Catholic schools • More formation for priests
  - Outreach to all the baptised • Outreach to the wider community • Putting Gospel values in action
- Remain faithful to Church teaching • Remain faithful to Church teaching on marriage • Share the faith with others • Use social media to engage people • Welcome back priests who have left to marry

MISSIONARY AND EVANGELISING

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

“We are asked to be Missionary Disciples to do God’s mission as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus. To encourage and lead young families, by example, to the church. To model a Catholic life in our families, school and communities. To pray often”.

“Based on the Gospel ‘that penance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, unto all nations’, that we should love our neighbour, love God and follow the commandments.

My suggestions and comments on how I think we can live this out: To bring more people into the Church - stronger catechesis at schools and parishes ... Greater emphasis on the sacraments. Confession is vital for people to receive the mercy of God and have their sins forgiven - as such, people need to know why confession is necessary, and more times available to access this sacrament would be helpful. People need to learn apologetics and be prepared to evangelise and also defend the faith”.

“More formation & teaching needed for the Mass/Eucharist for young people”.

“How will the Good News be proclaimed?

These days, most Catholics do not go to church, so do not hear any teachings from the pulpit. Therefore, the bishops must use any and all means of communication to spread the Good News – perhaps a weekly newspaper column, a blog, a ten-minute TV session once a week, and using social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook). Of course, the world will object, but that doesn’t matter – at least people would know where the Catholic Church stands on important issues and articles of faith”.

“God is asking us to be accepting of refugees and to understand and reach out to our indigenous people and those that are marginalised. God wants us to stop taking and to start giving”.

“I feel God is calling us to listen to each other and work together”.

“I think that God is asking of us down here in Australia to be attentive towards Christian persecution and religious freedom, especially as our nation is becoming more secular. In relation, I also believe He is asking us to defend our faith and not be afraid to say that we are Christians”.

“Have faith that He will keep His promise to be with us. And trusting in God’s grace, the Holy Spirit given to us, to go out and make disciples for Jesus Our Lord and teach them to do the same. Humbly renew our own encounter with the mercy and compassion of God in Jesus, to be forgiven and healed, and to be set free to encounter our world with that same mercy and compassion.”



MISSIONARY AND EVANGELISING

“...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem...and to the ends of the earth.”

(ACTS 1:8)

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What questions do you have about the future of Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

“How can the Church go about changing societal values on abortion and other life issues?”

“Are we giving enough support for parents as the primary educators of their children in the faith?”

“How can we focus more on families, welcoming them and involving them? They are the Church of tomorrow?”

“Who is evangelising the evangelisers?”

“How can the Church go about reinforcing Church teaching within our own congregations?”

“How do we get people to return to prayer when we live in such a fast paced life?”

“How do we deal with the lack of clergy available to celebrate communion at some parishes and some schools?”

“How can the Church support the faith of its school and other teachers?”

MISSIONARY AND EVANGELISING

A SNAPSHOT OF

Your Stories of Faith

CHACKO

60 YEARS OLD. ADELAIDE

I was ordained a Priest [in] 1985 and left active ministry in 2005. I and my wife migrated to Australia for higher studies in 2005, and are well settled in life with professional jobs and active ministry participation in the Catholic faith. I would welcome the opportunity to return to the priesthood, as I come with a deeper and broader understanding of life, of the joys and struggles being experienced by the people and communities I would be serving. I have an enhanced wisdom of life prompted by the signs of the times that bring strong connections to families and communities.



PATRICIA

71 YEARS OLD. BRISBANE

I love my Catholic faith, and live it every day. Without the Eucharist in Mass and listening to the homily, I would find life more difficult. Our western world leads many people on the wrong paths in life, and if they have no guidance from our church leaders, we will see empty pews in our churches. Especially under 55's. Our Catholic schools must prepare our students to be more active in the practice of their faith, and to resist the temptations that await them in the wider world. Our young people want the Church to be more inclusive of both men and women. And to realise, also, that they, the youth, have had little exposure to what the Church offers as in previous generations. Change must come.



VINCENT

23 YEARS OLD. PARRAMATTA

When I was in year 11, I went to a 14-day retreat. We had daily Holy Hours, prayed the Rosary, listened to many talks, went on street evangelisation and door knocking, observed times of silence and still managed to play games and do fun activities as well. As a shy person, I found it challenging to talk to others and especially when I went door knocking. But everyone was so welcoming and charitable that upon reflection, I realised I'd found a pocket of hope in a world of despair. It changed my life because although I intellectually understood that God loved me, having been taught this at school, at the retreat I truly felt His love in my heart. It was the love and charity everyone had for each other and for me that touched me and helped me to see and tangibly feel God's love for me.







**UPCOMING REPORTS:**

Inclusive, participatory and synodal	JUNE 23, 2019
Prayerful and Eucharistic	JUNE 30, 2019
Humble, healing and merciful	JULY 7, 2019
A Joyful, hope-filled and servant community	JULY 14, 2019
Open to conversion, renewal and reform	JULY 21, 2019

Please note this report contains only a snapshot of thousands of stories and responses shared. A comprehensive report on the voices of participants will be released on July 28, 2019.

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Appendix 16: Snapshot Report 2 - Inclusive, Participative and Synodal



**Snapshot Report**  
How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is:  
**INCLUSIVE, PARTICIPATORY AND SYNODAL**



## INCLUSIVE, PARTICIPATORY AND SYNODAL

AS WE MOVE INTO THIS SECOND STAGE OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL JOURNEY, WE CONTINUE TO SEEK THE WISDOM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Beginning in July 2019, we are invited to reflect on Scripture, Church teaching and our contemporary situation in order to discern the answer to this question: How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is inclusive, participatory and synodal? The fruits of what is discerned during this time will help shape the agenda of the first session of Plenary Council in October 2020.

This National Theme for Discernment is inspired by the voices of the People of God who expressed a desire for individuals and groups within and also beyond the Church to find a better welcome and be incorporated more into her life and mission. There was a call to renew forms of governance and leadership in the Church, to find ways formally and informally of being co-responsible for ministry and mission, seeking structures and processes of collaboration, shared decision-making and financial co-responsibility in order to enable this greater involvement of lay people particularly of women, young people, people of diverse cultural backgrounds and people with disabilities. There was an expressed need for stronger connections across the many parts of the Church, and with other Christian traditions.

## TOPICS: WHAT DID PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?

People spoke about a number of different topics in **PHASE 1: LISTENING & DIALOGUE**. A comprehensive report on all the voices of participants will be released on **JULY 28, 2019**.

Below are some of the topics that informed this particular theme, which was created through a combination of analysis, discernment and prayer.

- A voice in the selection and appointment of bishops • Affordable adult faith formation courses • Baby Boomer generation to listen to young Catholics • Become a Vatican II church • Better communication of what the Church does
- Better implementation of Royal Commission Recommendations • Better interface between parish and school
- Better Plenary Council process • Better preparation and support for married couples • Better selection and formation of candidates to priesthood • Better teachers in Catholic schools • Better use of finances • Care for neighbour
- Care for the environment • Care for the family • Church should adapt to multicultural reality • Communion for all
- Concerns for diminishing parish communities • Creation of small communities/groups within parishes • Cultural Masses
- Defend right-to-life issues • Diocesan Pastoral Council • End celibacy, allow priests to be married • End Clericalism
- End discrimination of LGBTQ • Establish more youth programs • Evangelisation in and of the family • Faith formation for parents • Fight for human rights issues • Focus on Ecumenism • Greater access to Mass and Reconciliation • Greater connection with and inclusion of Indigenous Australians • Greater focus on Jesus Christ
- Greater focus on permanent deacons • Greater focus on the Word of God • Greater inclusion of all people
- Greater involvement of the laity • Greater leadership from priests • Greater recognition of Eastern Catholic Churches • Greater role for women • Greater trust, faith and hope in God • Hierarchy to listen to the laity
- Importance of Communion services in rural parishes • Inclusion of the divorced and remarried • Laity supporting priests • Lay-led parishes • Lay-led liturgies and Masses • Listen to one another more • Mass to be appealing to youth and children • Modernise Church teachings • More chaplains, youth ministers
- More formation for priests • More transparency and accountability regarding clergy sexual abuse
- More welcoming parishes • New leadership and governance model • New model of Church, diocese, parish
- Ordaining married men to be priests • Ordination of women • Outreach to all the baptised • Outreach to the wider community • Outreach to youth • Overseas priests • Parish pastoral council • Parishes involved in planning for the future • Provide more youth facilities in parishes • Putting Gospel values in action
- Radical change, a new order, inverted pyramid • Restore the Third Rite of Reconciliation • Servant leadership • Share the faith with others • Special care of rural parishes • Stronger parish communities • Support same-sex marriage
- Transparency in governance and decision making • Use social media to engage people • Welcome back priests who have left to marry • Women deacons • Work together in unity • Youth to be involved more in Church community

## INCLUSIVE, PARTICIPATORY AND SYNODAL

## A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

## What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

**“To build a compassionate, welcoming, inclusive and courageous community where we come together to better understand Gospel values, how to live them and put them into practice — strengthened by ritual prayer so as to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit”.**

**“Women need to be equal and their presence in all Church governance needs to be equal to the male presence.”**

**Women shouldn’t only be able to be acolytes but also deacons and, yes, priests. There’s a whole hurting humanity because some people don’t want to go to a male priest for reconciliation. We are all Christ bearers”.**

**“To reintroduce and promote the Third Rite of Reconciliation so as to encourage more parishioners to participate in the sacrament, as neither the First or Second Rites are attracting many parishioners.”**

**“I have been a teacher for nearly 30 years in the same Catholic Secondary College ... I have personally suffered much persecution for my Catholic/Christian beliefs at school. There have been and are teachers who openly criticize students who have a faith and practice it, live it out, speak up about social issues that plague Australian society. It seems it is okay to have a social/moral stand on poverty, homelessness and other social issues affecting Australia but you cannot speak up about sex before marriage, homosexuality etc. ... Teachers like myself are few in number and many keep silent so as to not be found out for fear of reprisals”.**

**“God is asking us as a whole ‘Come back to me with all your hearts’.**

**There is not enough passion and commitment in us Catholics following the teachings given to us in the Bible by Jesus (and even the prophets in the Old Testament) and God wants to invite all of us young and old back into relationship with Him to know Him as He truly is, to love Him with heart, soul and mind, and to serve (to give without counting the cost) only Him”.**

**“God is calling the teachers in schools and the laity to be better educated in the faith to then be able to pass on the faith to children. The laity need to be taught how to encourage children and lapsed Catholics to practise their faith”.**

**“To be compassionate to the marginalised. To be outspoken about injustice in all its forms.**

**To be inclusive to all, irrespective of sexual disposition or marital status.**

**To modernise with the times”.**

**“While lay involvement is getting better and the Church does listen, I would love to see a Church that involves the laity more [and] gives more of a scope for the laity to participate in the management of the Church”.**

INCLUSIVE, PARTICIPATORY AND SYNODAL

“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”

(ACTS 4:32-33)

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What questions do you have about the future of Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

“Our parish clergy are overworked, stressed and stretched beyond reasonable limits. Moving beyond strategies of parish amalgamation and closure, what other options will we explore? By that I mean the non-ordained’s role in making pastoral decisions?”

“How does the Church law allow for inclusion of all peoples? Do we need to adapt these laws to a changing world?”

“Why has the hierarchy failed to publicise the good works undertaken by our schools, hospitals, refugee support, etc?”

“How can a more synodal approach to leadership in the Church at parish and diocesan levels be exercised as a shared responsibility, by virtue of Baptism, between both lay and clergy?”

“How is the Church able to respond to the diversity of our community to be inclusive of all – Indigenous/First Nations, environmental protection, gay rights?”

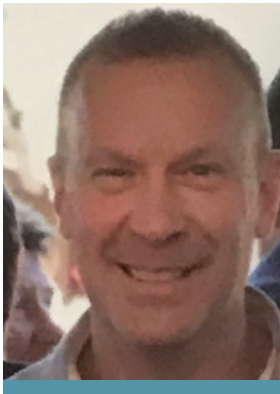
“How can we better nourish and support the spiritual life of adult lay people? ”

INCLUSIVE, PARTICIPATORY AND SYNODAL

A SNAPSHOT OF  
Your Stories of Faith

DENNIS  
SYDNEY

**I have found being part of a ministry quite rewarding.** I currently hold [a] position ... [on a] parish pastoral council. The role can be time-consuming but very rewarding at the same time. For a long time, I was a parishioner who would attend Mass and that was it. My parish priest asked me to serve on the council and I am pleased to make my individual contribution to the parish. Further to that, I feel that I am serving God.



JENNI  
PERTH

**My husband’s and my faith in the Catholic Church has been sorely tested since a new priest came to our parish.** We tried to work with him in many ways and on many levels, but he was not open to growth or advice from others. We have come out of this experience with an even stronger connection to Jesus/God/ the Spirit and each other, but are very disappointed not only in the way this priest operated but how our concerns were handled by some members of the hierarchy.



JESSICA  
MELBOURNE

**From the ages 15 to 20, I attended a young adult faith formation group through my parish.** It taught the Church’s teaching on moral and ethical issues, it also covered explanations on the Mass. Guest speakers were invited and it was well attended. I am ever grateful for this formative opportunity, given to me through the generosity of young, faithful, passionate lay Catholics. This adult formation set me up for life; I still recall the basic principles I learnt 15 years ago on absolute truth, transubstantiation and ethics relating to abortions and euthanasia.





**RELEASED REPORTS:**

Missionary and Evangelising [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/missionary](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/missionary)

**UPCOMING REPORTS:**

Prayerful and Eucharistic	JUNE 30, 2019
Humble, healing and merciful	JULY 7, 2019
A Joyful, hope-filled and servant community	JULY 14, 2019
Open to conversion, renewal and reform	JULY 21, 2019

Please note this report contains only a snapshot of thousands of stories and responses shared. A comprehensive report on the voices of participants will be released on July 28, 2019.

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## Appendix 17: Snapshot Report 3 - Prayerful and Eucharistic



## Snapshot Report

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is:

# PRAYERFUL AND EUCHARISTIC

THE NATIONAL THEMES FOR DISCERNMENT





PRAYERFUL AND EUCHARISTIC

AS WE MOVE INTO THIS SECOND STAGE OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL JOURNEY, WE CONTINUE TO SEEK THE WISDOM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Beginning in July 2019, we are invited to reflect on Scripture, Church teaching and our contemporary situation in order to discern the answer to this question: How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is prayerful and Eucharistic? The fruits of what is discerned during this time will help shape the agenda of the first session of Plenary Council in October 2020.

This National Theme for Discernment is inspired by the voices of the People of God who shared how deeply they treasured the Eucharist and the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church. There was a call for stronger and more engaging preaching, with an emphasis on the Word of God and connection to daily life, some seeking a uniquely Australian expression of prayer and Eucharistic celebration, drawing from the wisdom and rituals of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and also bringing together the many migrant communities which make up the Church in Australia. There were many divergent expressions of ways in which people and communities encounter God through their experiences of prayer, music and liturgy, and a desire for catechesis, training and formation for those in ministries related to these.

TOPICS: WHAT DID PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?

People spoke about a number of different topics in PHASE 1: LISTENING & DIALOGUE. A comprehensive report on all the voices of participants will be released on JULY 28, 2019.

Below are some of the topics that informed this particular theme, which was created through a combination of analysis, discernment and prayer.

- Acknowledge Christ’s presence in the Eucharist • Affordable adult faith formation courses
- Authentic faith teaching in Catholic schools • Better attention to all aspects of liturgy • Better communication of what the Church does • Better Faith formation • Better formation for liturgical ministries and sacramental programs • Better homilies • Charismatic spirituality • Church to act as a guide for Australian society • Contemplative spirituality • Cultural Masses • Eucharistic adoration
- Greater attention to music in the liturgy • Greater emphasis on prayer and Sacraments • Greater focus on Jesus Christ • Greater focus on the Word of God • Greater involvement of the laity • Greater leadership from Bishops • Greater leadership from priests • Greater support for RCIA • Greater trust, faith and hope in God
- Importance of Communion services in rural parishes • Keep the commandments • Keep the faith • Listen to the Holy Spirit • Mass to be appealing to youth and children • New translation of the Mass (inclusive language)
- Pray the Rosary • Remain faithful to Church teaching • Remain faithful to Church teaching on marriage
- Renewed call to holiness • Return to Traditional Latin Mass • Return to traditional pre-Vatican II ways

PRAYERFUL AND EUCHARISTIC

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

“Eucharistic Adoration: For Churches to offer daily Holy Hours or, where possible, perpetual Eucharistic Adoration to grow deeper in faith”.

“Pray more. To be more reverent at Mass.  
  
God wants us to obey God’s truth in the Bible, God wants us to obey the 10 Commandments. God wants us to say the Rosary. God wants us to love Him. God wants a personal relationship with Him”.

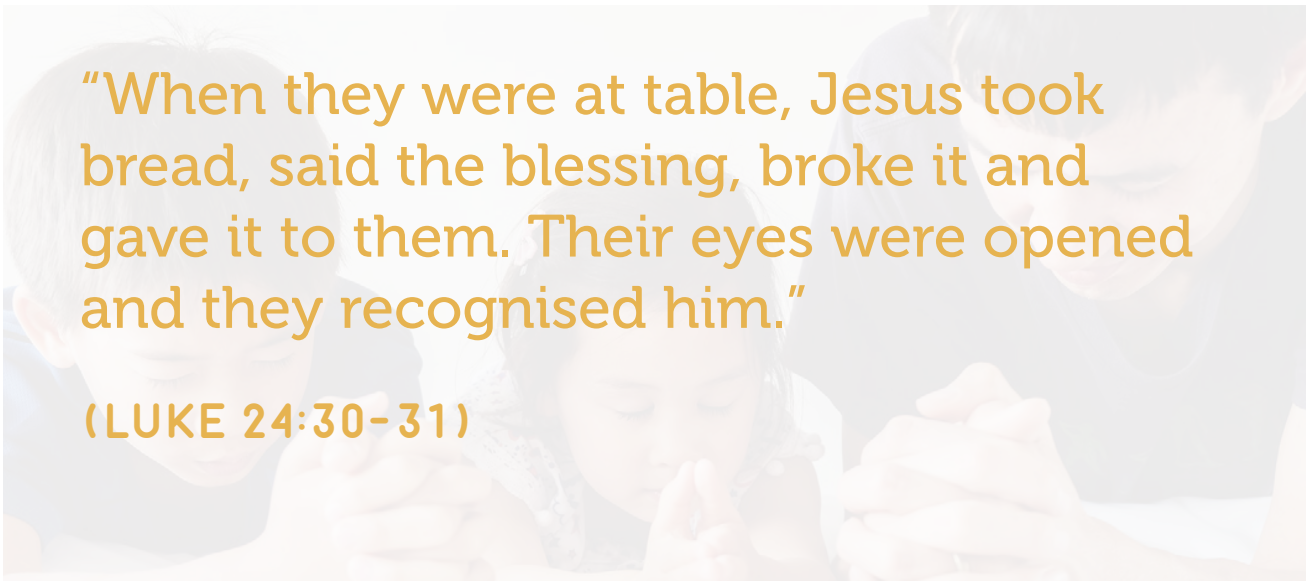
“I think God is wanting us so-called Christians to get involved with learning more about our faith, to enable us to pass information onto the outside world; that is, hungry to know the truth. We can’t say we go to Mass and think that is all God expects of us”.

“Firstly to be patient. Many improvements/revivals in the Catholic Church over the centuries came from new movements inspired by the Holy Spirit.  
  
Secondly, to listen. Much wrongdoing in our present society is very apparent if we revert to ‘first’ Christian principles.  
  
Thirdly, we need to act: The Church and its members are too institutionalised and divorced from what is happening in our own neighbourhoods. We are not doing or acting like Christ would have done and in fact what Christ is still today wanting us to do. I think Pope Francis is making a definite leap in this direction”.

“God is asking us not to give up on Catholic schools.  
  
I want Catholic education authorities to value the religious life of the Catholic school, not as a photo op or a 20-second sound bite, but as places that privilege the transmission of Catholic culture, where both tradition and contemporary life are valued”.



PRAYERFUL AND EUCHARISTIC



A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

# What questions do you have about the future of Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

“What does it mean to live a true Christian life?”

“How can we encourage all Catholics to be open to the Spirit working in people in different ways, through different forms of liturgy (traditional and charismatic), different types of worship and different faith responses to the Spirit in individuals and communities?”

“How do we get people to return to prayer when we live in such a fast-paced life?”

“Can lay-led liturgy be made to resemble the Mass more closely in regards to the prayers that are not part of lay-led liturgy but are part of the Mass?”

“How do all the faithful called to prayer and a living relationship with Jesus Christ learn about their faith through the Sacraments, catechesis, ongoing education and following the traditions of the Church in a multicultural society which has become very secular?”

PRAYERFUL AND EUCHARISTIC

A SNAPSHOT OF

# Your Stories of Faith

**ALAN**  
72 YEARS OLD, SYDNEY

**As someone from a strong Catholic family,** I had the benefit of a good Catholic upbringing and education. After school, I joined the local parish CYO where I met my future wife, who also had experienced a similar faith journey. Throughout our lives we have engaged in retreats, parish missions, family group activities and RCIA programs. These have helped to continue our faith experiences.



**CELIA**  
58 YEARS OLD, MELBOURNE

**At the daily Mass I attend,** the priest will give a short three- to five-minute homily directly relevant to the Gospel and which aims to teach the faithful some key component of living Christian life and challenge us to live the faith better. The best homilies get to the point quickly and are not afraid of speaking clearly about the demands and rigour of living Catholic faith to the full.



**ANONYMOUS**

**I came close to God through crisis.** In many ways I feel like the prodigal son. When my wife was diagnosed with cancer at [in her 20s] my understanding of my faith was changed forever. Two years into her journey, I had completely turned my back on God – why would a loving God allow my wife to die and be in so much pain? Why would he let her get cancer at precisely the time we were planning to have children? Why would my life be completely disrupted to become her carer – losing my job and moving away from friends and family? I did not understand God, or where He was in my life at all. But I did witness my wife completely surrender her life to Him. She knew she was going to die and that God would take her to Heaven when He was ready for her. Three-and-a-half years after the diagnosis, He did exactly that. And I then realised that God was helping me the whole time – He was working through me to care for her, to be God for her and to love her. I sacrificed everything to care for her, but God gave me the physical, emotional and mental strength to carry [my wife] through her difficult earthly pilgrimage.

Read more stories and snapshots at [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/voices-of-the-plenary-council/](https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/voices-of-the-plenary-council/)



### RELEASED REPORTS:

Missionary and evangelising [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/missionary](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/missionary)  
 Inclusive, participatory and synodal [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/inclusive](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/inclusive)

### UPCOMING REPORTS:

Humble, healing and merciful	JULY 7, 2019
A joyful, hope-filled and servant community	JULY 14, 2019
Open to conversion, renewal and reform	JULY 21, 2019

Please note this report contains only a snapshot of thousands of stories and responses shared. A comprehensive report on the voices of participants will be released on July 28, 2019.

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## Appendix 18: Snapshot Report 4 - Humble, Healing and Merciful



### Snapshot Report

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is

**HUMBLE, HEALING  
AND MERCIFUL**

THE NATIONAL THEMES FOR DISCERNMENT





HUMBLE. HEALING AND MERCIFUL

AS WE MOVE INTO THIS SECOND STAGE OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL JOURNEY, WE CONTINUE TO SEEK THE WISDOM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Beginning in July 2019, we are invited to reflect on Scripture, Church teaching and our contemporary situation in order to discern the answer to this question: How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is humble, healing and merciful? The fruits of what is discerned during this time will help shape the agenda of the first session of Plenary Council in October 2020.

This National Theme for Discernment is inspired by the voices of the People of God who expressed a deep and faith-filled trust in God and a need for lament and healing within the Church, acknowledging the sexual abuse crisis as a turning point for the Church in Australia. It identified the need for relationship and reconciliation among many within the Catholic community, and with the wider Australian society, particularly with Australia’s First Peoples and with all of creation. A desire was expressed for stronger prayer and sacramental life and more effective outreach to those who seek healing, as a renewed openness to and sign of God’s mercy.

TOPICS: WHAT DID PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?

People spoke about a number of different topics in PHASE 1: LISTENING & DIALOGUE. A comprehensive report on all the voices of participants will be released on JULY 28, 2019.

Below are some of the topics that informed this particular theme, which was created through a combination of analysis, discernment and prayer.

- Allow contraception, birth control • Baby Boomer generation to listen to young Catholics • Be a witness in society
- Better communication of what the Church does • Better homilies • Better implementation of Royal Commission recommendations • Better training and support for youth leaders • Call to repentance for clergy sexual abuse
- Care for neighbour • Care for the environment • Care for the family • Defend right-to-life issues • End clericalism
- End discrimination of LGBTQ • Establish more youth programs • Fight for human rights issues • Focus on the new evangelisation • Greater access to Mass and Reconciliation • Greater concern for victims and survivors
- Greater connection with and inclusion of Indigenous Australians • Greater emphasis on prayer and sacraments
  - Greater focus on Jesus Christ • Greater focus on the Word of God • Greater leadership from bishops
- Greater leadership from priests • Greater recognition of Eastern Catholic Churches • Greater trust, faith and hope in God • Heal and move beyond the clergy sexual abuse scandal • Healing liturgies and public signs or acts of reparation for clergy sexual abuse • Inclusion of the divorced and remarried • Listen to one another more
- Mass to be appealing to youth and children • More transparency and accountability regarding clergy sexual abuse • More welcoming parishes • New translation of the Mass (inclusive language) • Outreach to all the baptised • Outreach to the wider community • Outreach to youth • Reduce margins between rich and poor
  - Restore the Third Rite of Reconciliation • Special care of rural parishes • Stronger parish communities
  - Transparency in governance and decision making • Youth to be involved more in Church community

HUMBLE. HEALING AND MERCIFUL

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

“In Australia we still have a big divide between Indigenous brothers and the rest of us.

The Church needs to take a leading role in building reconciliation by adopting positive gestures that enhance and challenge this overdue reconciliation”.

“We’re living in the wake of the greatest possible disaster that could have descended upon the Church in this country—the sexual abuse crisis.

Firstly, I think God wants every possible effort to be directed towards offering assistance to victims of abuse in the Church.

Secondly, I think that God wants us as a Church collective to hang our head in shame”.

“Discern how to engage and bring to active faith those parents who send their children to Catholic schools but are not churchgoers.

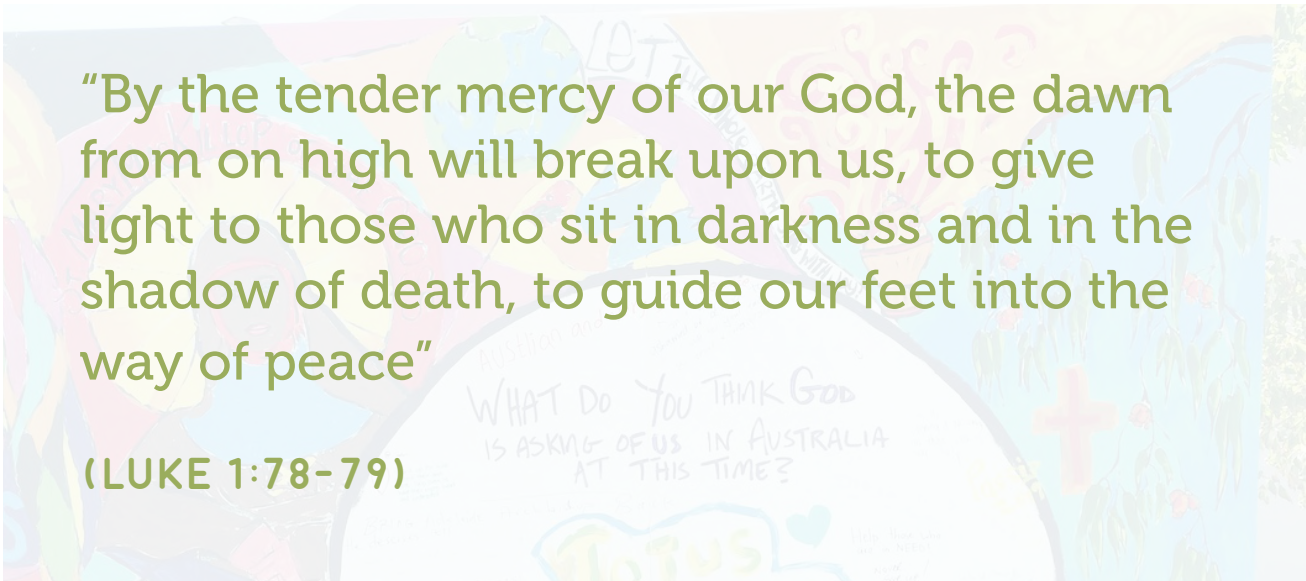
Discern how to engage and bring to active faith the many people who attend Mass at Easter and Christmas or for Baptisms, but not otherwise”.

“Divorce is never wanted or planned for and, in some cases, necessary for the safety and wellbeing of the individuals involved.

The Church should not turn their backs on them as this denies their dignity and makes them less equal than their peers”.

“God is asking us to do something about the clericalism and subsequent abuse arising from this misuse of power. He is asking us to remember and come to know Jesus and to live as He did”.

HUMBLE. HEALING AND MERCIFUL



A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

# What questions do you have about the future of Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

- “How does the Church plan to address the issue of sex offenders within the Church and how will it support its victims?”
- “Can we decrease authority in Church hierarchy and give some authority to the people?”
- “How do we use Church resources for service to the poor?”

- “How can we work to be more welcoming, inclusive, open, kind, loving, forgiving, compassionate, listening, and so build a ‘home/community’ Church for all, not just an institutional one?”
- “How can we make the Church more inclusive of divorced and remarried, LGBTIQ, people with a disability, including the mentally ill, those who have been damaged by abuse in the Church—emotional, spiritual, physical and sexual abuse?”

HUMBLE. HEALING AND MERCIFUL

A SNAPSHOT OF

# Your Stories of Faith

**GENNI**  
BUNBURY

**As a small group we are cradle Catholics with a strong faith base and love of God, but a floundering confidence in the institution that is the present Catholic Church.** We want the Church to move forward to reflect a contemporary outreach while still upholding the high moral values with regards to abortion, euthanasia and the sanctity of marriage for example. We seek to see the Church open its eyes to the needs in the communities in which we live. For example, abolish the “clericalism” attitude of some clergy that causes division and lack of inclusiveness. Our personal experience has seen the Baptism of four babies by a paedophile priest while a former priest in a parish community is deemed unworthy of his priesthood (because he married), but he had been a major positive influence in the day-to-day care of the parish community.



**BENJAMIN**  
ARMIDALE

**To have the courage to let go the trappings of clericalism.** To let go of elitism and exclusion. To embrace the downtrodden, the heart broken, the marginalised. For us to contemplate, how each of us may serve the Other? How may we tear down boundaries and take action to walk with others- to show mercy, to forgive, to love. To lead the way in bringing light to darkness- to take action in living-love in all things. To contemplate and act holistically- in our spiritual, social, political, environmental lives.



**RUTH**  
SANDHURST

**The sexual abuse scandal, the anti-gay marriage rhetoric, the patriarchal nature of governance and the attitude towards contraception has made it impossible for [my children] to remain active participants.** All of my children are strong advocates for social justice and they applaud the Australian bishops for their stance on offshore detention and other issues such as climate change. However, the Church in Australia must engage with the other issues mentioned if it is to have a hope of retaining educated women within the ranks of its faithful. As a teacher in a Catholic school, I find the only way to recontextualise my faith so that it has relevance to my students is through social justice. I continually promote Caritas and all its wonderful work but I despair at times for the future of my parish and the Church in Australia as a whole.



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**RELEASED REPORTS:**

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 Inclusive, participatory and synodal [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/inclusive](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/inclusive)  
 Prayerful and Eucharistic [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/prayerful](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/prayerful)

**UPCOMING REPORTS:**

A joyful, hope-filled and servant community JULY 14, 2019  
 Open to conversion, renewal and reform JULY 21, 2019

Please note this report contains only a snapshot of thousands of stories and responses shared. A comprehensive report on the voices of participants will be released on July 28, 2019.

<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au>

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## Appendix 19: Snapshot Report 5 - A Joyful, Hope-filled and Servant Community



### Snapshot Report

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is

**A JOYFUL, HOPE-FILLED AND SERVANT COMMUNITY**

THE NATIONAL THEMES FOR DISCERNMENT



A JOYFUL, HOPE-FILLED AND SERVANT COMMUNITY

AS WE MOVE INTO THIS SECOND STAGE OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL JOURNEY, WE CONTINUE TO SEEK THE WISDOM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Beginning in July 2019, we are invited to reflect on Scripture, Church teaching and our contemporary situation in order to discern the answer to this question: How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is a joyful, hope-filled and servant community? The fruits of what is discerned during this time will help shape the agenda of the first session of Plenary Council in October 2020.

This National Theme for Discernment is inspired by the voices of the People of God who expressed a yearning for the Church to be a sign of God’s kingdom for all people in Australia – to be able to see the Catholic Church in action, and to recognise Jesus. There was an expression of faith-filled hope in the capacity of the Catholic community to celebrate together, to show what it is to be a follower of Christ and to be loved unconditionally by God. There was a call to contemplate the Gospel call to be a servant Church for the good of all people in Australia – particularly for refugees and asylum-seekers and other people who are vulnerable or at risk. Many responses called for greater sharing of the story of the good works done by so many people and organisations of the Church. Some responses expressed a hunger for strong witness of faith, especially by priests, young people and female leaders in parish and school ministries.

TOPICS: WHAT DID PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?

People spoke about a number of different topics in PHASE 1: LISTENING & DIALOGUE. A comprehensive report on all the voices of participants will be released on JULY 28, 2019.

Below are some of the topics that informed this particular theme, which was created through a combination of analysis, discernment and prayer.

- Acknowledge Christ’s presence in the Eucharist • Authentic faith teaching in Catholic schools • Be a witness in society • Better attention to all aspects of liturgy • Better communication of what the Church does
- Better formation for liturgical ministries and sacramental programs • Better homilies • Better selection and formation of candidates to priesthood • Better use of finances • Care for neighbour • Charismatic spirituality • Church to act as a guide for Australian society • Contemplative spirituality • Creation of small communities/groups within parishes
- Cultural Masses • Defend right-to-life issues • End clericalism • Faith formation for parents • Greater access to Mass and Reconciliation • Greater attention to music in the liturgy • Greater connection with and inclusion of Indigenous Australians • Greater focus on Jesus Christ • Greater focus on permanent deacons • Greater focus on the Word of God
- Greater inclusion of all people • Greater leadership from priests • Greater trust, faith and hope in God • Hierarchy to listen to the Laity • Keep the faith • Laity supporting priests • Listen to one another more • Listen to the Holy Spirit • Mass to be appealing to youth and children • More welcoming parishes • Outreach to all the baptised
- Outreach to the wider community • Outreach to youth • Overseas priests • Parish pastoral council • Parishes involved in planning for the future • Pray the Rosary • Putting Gospel values in action • Renewed call to holiness • Share the faith with others • Stronger parish communities • Work together in unity • Youth to be involved more in Church community

A JOYFUL, HOPE-FILLED AND SERVANT COMMUNITY

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

**“The Church in Australia is completely fragmented. Unify the approach for the future so that all priests and laity are ‘on the same page’.**

**At present, each diocese, and even each parish, follows its own rules, set by the bishop or, in some cases, the parish priest. The Church must come together in order to survive. Some parishes are very progressive in their thinking and practices, but others follow a very hard-line conservative approach”.**

**“Strengthen our practice as Christians through public worship and genuine assistance to the people seeking a loving relationship with Jesus. We need to reach people who are not inclined to attend established public worship”.**

**“To be not afraid in this time of the denial of God as God is always with us.**

**To pray, pray, pray. Prayer is the oxygen of the soul and without it we cannot be close to God. Bishops, priests and religious nuns should constantly encourage the faithful to pray the Rosary and to frequently spend time in Adoration of the Holy Eucharist. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is much neglected in these times and the faithful should be constantly urged by bishops and priests to return to the practice of monthly Reconciliation”.**

**“To serve Him and others. Love always and grow in love with others. Pray more. Live out the Gospel values. Increased discussions on bigger issues, e.g. poverty, abortion. The ability to discuss our beliefs with everyone. Practise what we preach and believe. Celebrate the greater things in life. Be appreciative of the gifts God gave each of us. Include and accept all cultures within our community. Remember that God loves us unconditionally. Take care of our environment”.**

**“To turn back to prayer in our daily lives.**

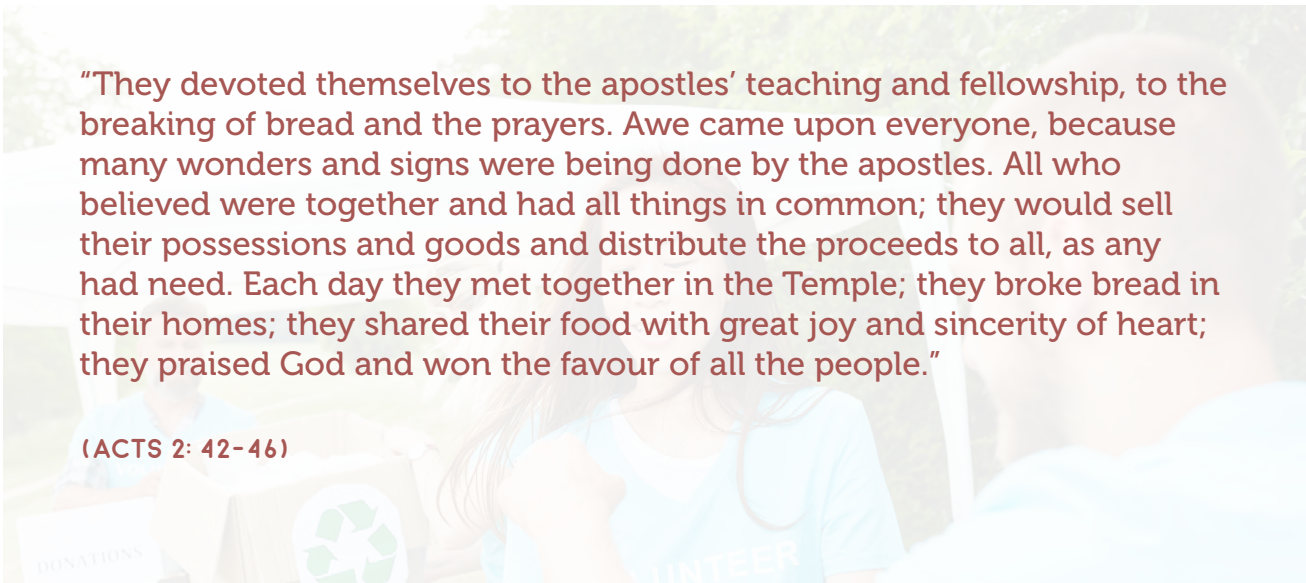
**To look for good in others, put them first, love our neighbour. We pray when we are in trouble, but must remember to thank God when our prayers are answered. Look after the elderly and sick in our parish.**

**To give back to them for their long service to our parish life. They may need someone to visit them and support them. This is a very worthwhile parish ministry to be encouraged.**

**To have some follow-up with parents who have attended the preparation classes for their children to receive the sacraments to encourage them to attend Sunday Mass in the future and join our parish life”.**



A JOYFUL, HOPE-FILLED AND SERVANT COMMUNITY



“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Each day they met together in the Temple; they broke bread in their homes; they shared their food with great joy and sincerity of heart; they praised God and won the favour of all the people.”

(ACTS 2: 42-46)

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What questions do you have about the future of Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

“How do we engage people to be members of their parish community?”

“How do we offer hope to the Catholic people of Australia?”

“How can we better integrate our many foreign-born priests into the Australian Church?”

“Are we willing to return to the simplicity and fidelity required to reawaken a love of God’s truth in the world?”

“Can liturgy be more a means of expression of what is happening in a community—joy, grief, forgiveness, etc.—rather than a rigid adherence to ‘ritual’ which is not always relevant to a situation or life-giving?”

A JOYFUL, HOPE-FILLED AND SERVANT COMMUNITY

A SNAPSHOT OF

Your Stories of Faith

EUGENIA

BRISBANE

**Some parishes are very welcoming as they know their community and are attentive to each other.** In this way, they practise charity and more people will be willing to engage in their activities. [At one parish] the parish council is aware of greeting newcomers, they organise a monthly morning tea with the community and celebrate special occasions together.



JOHN

BRISBANE

**We enjoyed the RCIA journey and were confirmed at the Easter Vigil.** About 17 years later, I attended a Cursillo retreat and it also renewed my faith and helped me understand more about community. We are involved in a small Rosary group at the moment and the friendship and joy that has brought to me has been incredible. I am so glad that God brought me to the Church and that it was in the post-Vatican II era. The people really are the body of Christ along with all true believers.



PATRICK

MELBOURNE

**I had a mother who had great faith which she received from her mother.** Their faith was sustained by Mass and the family Rosary. They attended state schools as they lived in a remote area. Mum could argue intelligently with any trained theologian as she had received a deep understanding of her faith from her mother. I witnessed the power of prayer and how often it is answered even when you think that there is no hope – almost miraculous – definitely astounding and very impressive. Mum used to say the Rosary will sustain your faith. I gave up the daily Rosary eventually. I then realised that my life just wasn’t working. I went back to it and I have noticed an enormous improvement in almost every area. I suspect the Rosary requires things like faith, hope, trust, humility, self sacrifice and contemplation on the core moments of Gospels.



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**RELEASED REPORTS:**

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 Humble, healing and merciful [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/humble](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/humble)

**UPCOMING REPORTS:**

Open to conversion, renewal and reform

JULY 21, 2019

Please note this report contains only a snapshot of thousands of stories and responses shared. A comprehensive report on the voices of participants will be released on July 28, 2019.

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## Appendix 20: Snapshot Report 6 - Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform



### Snapshot Report

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is

**O P E N T O  
C O N V E R S I O N ,  
R E N E W A L A N D R E F O R M**

THE NATIONAL THEMES FOR DISCERNMENT





OPEN TO CONVERSION, RENEWAL AND REFORM

AS WE MOVE INTO THIS SECOND STAGE OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL JOURNEY, WE CONTINUE TO SEEK THE WISDOM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Beginning in July 2019, we are invited to reflect on Scripture, Church teaching and our contemporary situation in order to discern the answer to this question: How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is open to conversion, renewal and reform? The fruits of what is discerned during this time will help shape the agenda of the first session of the Plenary Council in October 2020.

This National Theme for Discernment is inspired by the voices of the People of God who expressed a desire to do things differently in response to Christ and the experience of our people, accepting that faithfulness to tradition requires change that is both personal and communal. Respondents also affirmed the important role of the clergy, expressing their appreciation for their vocation and recognising the need for support and ongoing formation and accompaniment. Some asked for a consideration of alternative approaches to ordained ministry, some for a greater inclusion of laity and different groups in the Church’s life, some for new models of governance and leadership, and some for a renewed fidelity to the Church’s teachings. There was also a call for a renewed life of prayer and communion with one another, including understanding the many different ways in which we encounter God and experience a conversion of heart.

TOPICS: WHAT DID PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?

People spoke about a number of different topics in [PHASE 1: LISTENING & DIALOGUE](#). A comprehensive report on all the voices of participants will be released on [JULY 28, 2019](#).

Below are some of the topics that informed this particular theme, which was created through a combination of analysis, discernment and prayer.

- Better communication of what the Church does
- Better formation for liturgical ministries and sacramental programs
- Better implementation of Royal Commission recommendations
- Better Plenary Council process
- Better selection and formation of candidates to priesthood
- Better teachers in Catholic schools
- Better use of finances
- Charismatic spirituality
- Communion for all
- Concerns for diminishing parish communities
- Contemplative spirituality
- Creation of small communities/groups within parishes
- Diocesan Pastoral Council
- End celibacy, allow priests to be married
- End clericalism
- End discrimination of LGBTQ
- Fight for human rights issues
- Focus on the new evangelisation
- Greater focus on Jesus Christ
- Greater focus on permanent deacons
- Greater focus on the Word of God
- Greater inclusion of all people
- Greater involvement of the laity
- Greater leadership from bishops
- Greater leadership from priests
- Greater trust, faith and hope in God
- Heal and move beyond the clergy sexual abuse scandal
- Healing liturgies and public signs or acts of reparation for clergy sexual abuse
- Hierarchy to listen to the Laity
- Inclusion of the divorced and remarried
- Laity supporting priests
- Lay-led parishes
- Lay-led liturgies and Masses
- Listen to one another more
- Listen to the Holy Spirit
- Mass to be appealing to youth and children
- Modernise Church teachings
- New leadership and governance model
- New model of Church, diocese, parish
- New translation of the Mass (inclusive language)
- Ordaining married men to be priests
- Ordination of women
- Overseas priests
- Parish pastoral council
- Parishes involved in planning for the future
- Radical change, a new order, inverted pyramid
- Reduce margins between rich and poor
- Renewed call to holiness
- Restore the Third Rite of Reconciliation
- Servant leadership
- Support same-sex marriage
- Transparency in governance and decision-making
- Use social media to engage people
- Welcome back priests who have left to marry
- Women deacons

OPEN TO CONVERSION, RENEWAL AND REFORM

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

“Adopt a change of heart. Adopt a team approach and inclusivity within the Church. Adopt the Gospel values. All baptised have a role in the life and mission of the Church...”.

“As a community voice, the vision we have for an Australian Catholic Church is that it be a place for all Australian Catholics. At the moment, it is not. I would like to see our Church be more inclusive. We exclude the very people Jesus would have walked out of His way to help”.

“To form a cooperative structure of bishop, priests, religious and laity to lead and oversight the leadership and management of the Church. This could be done by a group of people working together as a pastoral council of the diocese or as a group of 6 or 8 on an elected ‘Board’. There would be an equal number of women and laity”.

“Leaders in the Church, especially bishops, priests and consecrated members, need to be courageous in sharing their faith without compromising on any of the more controversial topics as models for the rest of the members of the Church, especially those members who are disheartened or afraid to proclaim Christ’s teachings”.

“Bishops and priests are called upon more than ever to bear witness to the Gospel values of humility, service and solidarity with ordinary people, especially the poor - in fact and deed, not just in words. As Pope Paul VI once said, ‘The Church needs witnesses more than teachers’—now more than ever!”.

“Priests should have a choice as to whether they wish to marry and have families and serve God in a vocation they have been called to. This can also enable them to minister and support families who are in crises”.

OPEN TO CONVERSION. RENEWAL AND REFORM

"After John the Baptist had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee and began preaching the Good News of God. He said, 'The time has come; the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the Good News'."

(MARK 1:14-15)

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What questions do you have about the future of Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

"How do we empower our youth to take on more of a leadership role?"	"Will you review the annulment process so it is more understanding of real life circumstances and not punish someone whose marriage has ended— particularly if it has ended due to abuse and deception?"
"How can women be included into the governance of the Church at the highest levels?"	"Are you willing to put aside traditions ('this is the the way we have always done things') and dedicate yourselves to prayer to hear from and listen to the quiet, still leading of the Holy Spirit—what God has for the next chapter of the Catholic Church is Australia? "
"How can a more synodal approach to leadership in the Church at parish and diocesan levels be exercised as a shared responsibility, by virtue of baptism, between both lay and clergy?"	"How will sacraments be administered with declining numbers of clergy?"
"Our parish clergy are overworked, stressed and stretched beyond reasonable limits. Moving beyond strategies of parish amalgamation and closure, what other options will we explore—and by that I mean, the non-ordained role in making pastoral decisions?"	"How do we provide much better support for priests new to their role as leaders; priests in a new country; priests new to a diocese or different place?"

OPEN TO CONVERSION. RENEWAL AND REFORM

A SNAPSHOT OF  
Your Stories of Faith

PAULINE  
PERTH

**We had a wonderful parish priest.** His humility, willingness to serve, selflessness and compassion changed my life at a time when I was considering looking for an alternative parish or maybe even denomination. He made every person in our large parish feel important to God. Because of the way he radiates the love of Christ, people wanted to be involved. He taught me that humility, gentleness, patience and love are the key to closeness to Jesus. Priests who are part of the parish community, not set apart from the community, make such a difference.



PENELOPE  
BROKEN BAY

**As a married couple with young children, [our local parish] formed my ideal of parish: a warm community with many people participating eagerly in parish activities.** So what was the secret of this parish? I suggest it was a priest who listened to his people, discerned their needs and acted on what he heard; who was warm, democratic and inclusive. As a result, the parishioners responded with wholehearted participation and helped each other both in their spiritual lives and in their very active family lives. Perhaps it was a function of the time and the place, and perhaps now it would not be possible to work in exactly that way, but I need to believe that my experience of vibrant and nourishing parish life is still possible in Australia.



ANONYMOUS  
MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE

**One of our group has a gay brother who stopped going to his local parish community as he felt unwelcomed by the wider Church.** He wanted to be an active, practising Catholic who could receive Communion, but felt outcast under existing Church rules. It also put a great strain on his relationship with his practising sister as she was in terrible conflict between her love for her brother and her loyalty to obeying the Church rules. This conflict also extended to their wider family. In the end, he stayed away from church as a way of minimising the family conflict. The sister is realising that Jesus always loved and never judged the marginalised people he came into contact with and that people must always be put ahead of rules in a truly merciful Church. Surely, as a Church, we must be doing the same and welcoming the brother fully into our community.

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 Joyful, hope-filled servant community [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/servant](http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/servant)

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## Plenary Council Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit of Pentecost.  
 Come, Holy Spirit of the great South Land.

O God, bless and unite all your people in Australia  
 and guide us on the pilgrim way of the Plenary Council.

Give us the grace to see your face in one another  
 and to recognise Jesus, our companion on the road.

Give us the courage to tell our stories  
 and to speak boldly of your truth.

Give us ears to listen humbly to each other  
 and a discerning heart to hear what you are saying.

Lead your Church into a hope-filled future,  
 that we may live the joy of the Gospel.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
 bread for the journey from age to age.

Amen.

Our Lady Help of Christians, pray for us.  
 St Mary MacKillop, pray for us.





# Plenary Council 2020

Listen to what the Spirit is saying...

