



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

Final Report for Phase I: Listening and Dialogue

A Report to the Diocese of Armidale

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About this Report

The ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research is pleased to provide you with this report on the Plenary Council project.

The findings in this report are a summary of submissions that were received from your diocese in Phase One of the Plenary Council process called 'Listening and Dialogue'. The National Centre for Pastoral Research was granted ethics approval for the data analysis of this stage in November 2018 through the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Christian Research Association.

The online process for submissions in Phase One opened on 20 May 2018 and ran until 6 March 2019. Due to the high response rate in the last two months, this deadline was extended to 13 March 2019.

The findings in this report include data from all submissions from your diocese that were received online, along with those received via email or in hard copy format, such as letters, books and submissions made through the 2018 Christmas card campaign.

The analysis provided in this report is mainly quantitative in nature and explores the demographic characteristics of individuals and groups that participated in the process. Some examples of these characteristics examined in the report are age, sex, country of birth, location and religion. This analysis was done using Microsoft Excel and SPSS statistical software.

The report also includes a list of themes that were discussed by participants in their submissions related to the question: *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?* A complete list of themes that were discussed nationally can be found in the report *Listen To What The Spirit Is Saying: Final Report for the Plenary Council Phase I: Listening and Dialogue*. This analysis was done using NVivo software.

Along with the list of themes, we have also included in this report the submissions of participants who consented to have their submission made public as well as released to their diocese. These submissions (made in response to Question 1: *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?*) are published in full but have been de-identified in keeping with ethical protocols. Several participants made their submission through uploaded documents, while others uploaded additional material as part of their submission. These documents have been provided to the bishop of your diocese in electronic format.

The latter sections of this report contain a sample list of questions received from your diocese in response to Question 2: *What questions about the future of the Church in Australia would you like the Plenary Council to consider?* Along with this, a number of stories of faith or Church are shared, which were submitted by participants in response to Question 3: *Would you like to share a story about your experience of faith or of the Church in Australia that has shaped you?*

We hope you find this report insightful and helpful as we continue our work on the project.

Trudy Dantis

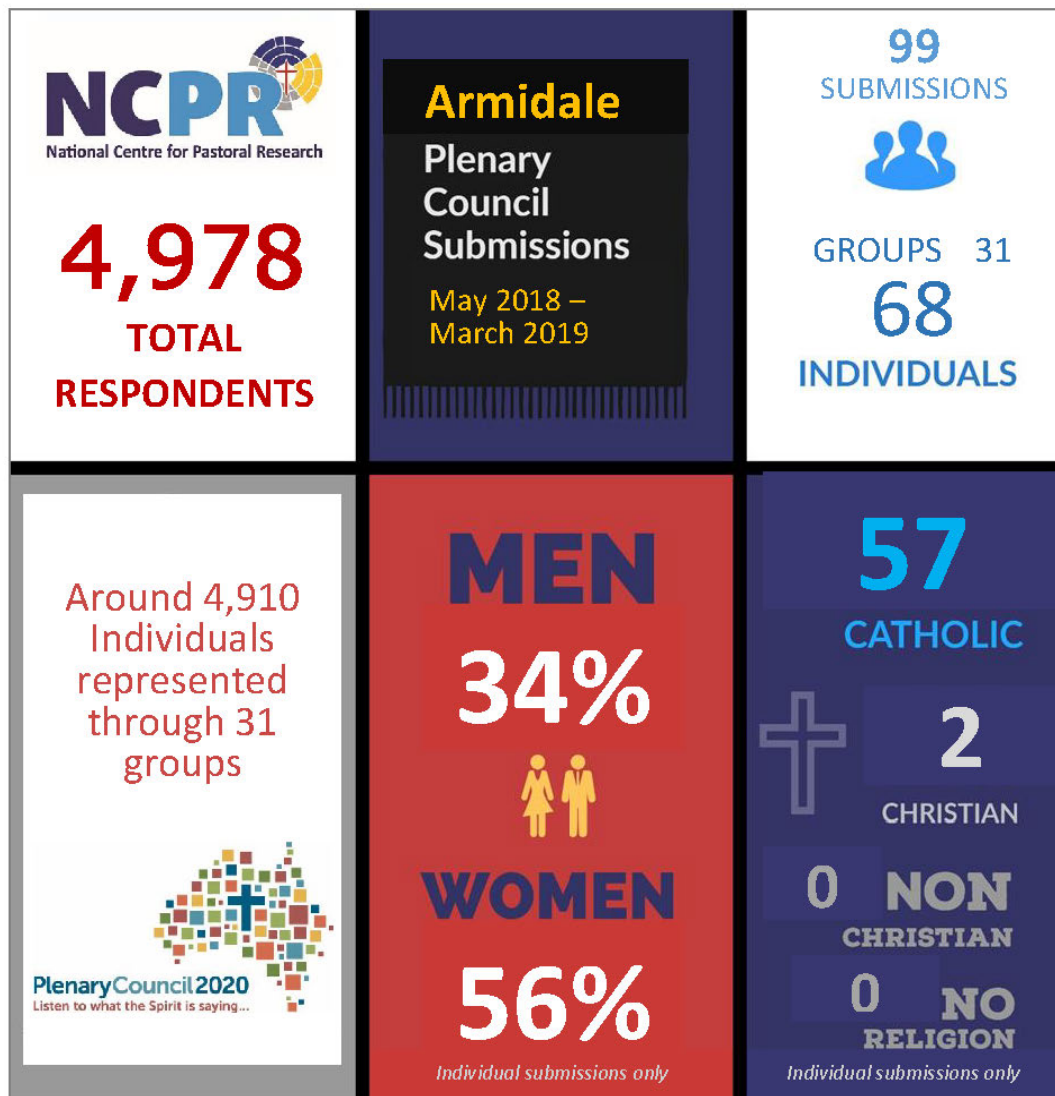
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Diocesan Submissions Summary Snapshot: May 2018—March 2019



Number of Submissions Received - all Australia

Across Australia, we received a total of 17,457 completed submissions from May 2018 until 13 March 2019. Of these, 9,690 respondents had participated in 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 Encounter.

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” process to over 222,000.

Number of Submissions Received - Armidale

The Plenary Council questionnaire did not ask respondents for the diocese in which they were located. However, it asked participants to type in their postcode. These postcodes were used as a basis for this analysis.

From the Diocese of Armidale, we received a total of 99 completed responses from May 2018 until 13 March 2019. Of these, 48 respondents had participated in a Listening and Dialogue Encounter, while another 16 were unsure if they had. About 34 respondents indicated that they had not participated in a Listening and Dialogue Encounter.

Of the 99 submissions, 31 submissions were from groups or organisations and 68 submissions were from individuals. There were 4,910 people represented through the 31 groups. It is important to note, however, that not all groups completed this question, so total group numbers may be under-represented.

Overall, the total number of respondents from your diocese was 4,978.

Table 1: Number of Submissions	
Total number of submissions received	99
<i>Participated in Listening & Dialogue Encounter?</i>	
Yes	48
No	34
Not sure	16
Not stated	1
Total	99
Submissions received from groups or organisations	31
Submissions received from individuals	68
Total	99

INDIVIDUAL SUBMISSIONS

At the close of the survey on 13 March 2019, a total of 68 individual submissions had been received from your diocese. Most of the individual submissions were made online. However, a number were also received through letters, emails and the Christmas card campaign.

Age of Respondents

Table 2 shows the ages of individual respondents from Armidale. Figure 1 is a graphical representation of the same table. About 71 per cent (48) were received from those aged 50 and over. The most number of submissions within this age range were received from the 70-74 years age group (10 responses).

At the close of submissions, there was only one individual submission received from those aged under 25.

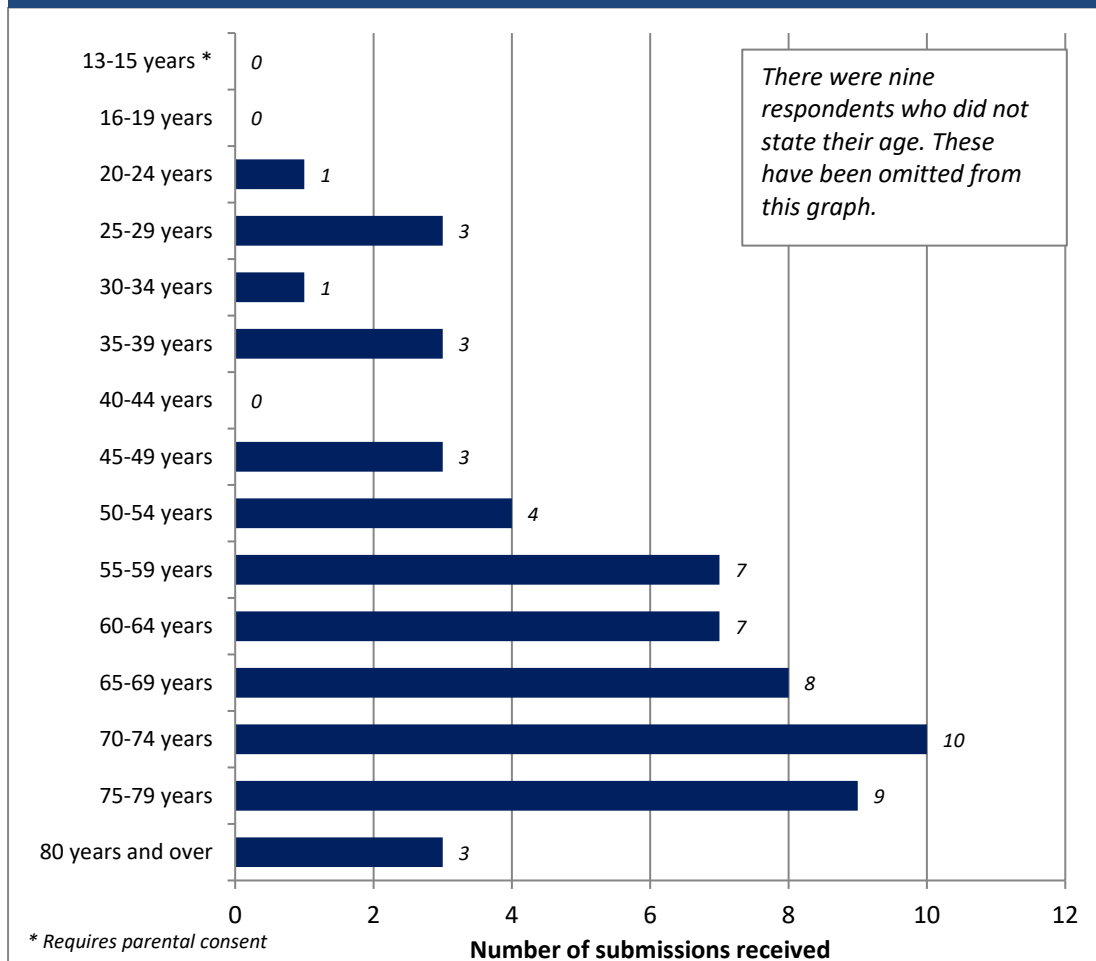
Participants aged 16-17 were encouraged to discuss the questionnaire with their parent or guardian. Many of these responses came from schools that sent in their responses through the online survey. As Table 2 shows, there were no individual submissions made from the 16-19 years age group in your diocese.

Participants aged 13-15 years were prompted to provide their parent or guardian's email address. An email was then automatically sent to seek consent for their child to participate in the study. There were no individual submissions made from this age group in your diocese.

Table 2: Age groups (*individual responses only*)

13-15 years *	0
16-19 years	0
20-24 years	1
25-29 years	3
30-34 years	1
35-39 years	3
40-44 years	0
45-49 years	3
50-54 years	4
55-59 years	7
60-64 years	7
65-69 years	8
70-74 years	10
75-79 years	9
80 years and over	3
Not stated	9
Total	68

* Requires parental consent

Fig. 1: Age groups (individual responses only)

Sex of Respondents

A little over half the number of all individual respondents from your diocese were female (56%), while a further 34 per cent were male. Table 3 shows that there were 23 men and 38 women who made submissions. One respondent preferred not to state their sex, while six respondents did not answer this question.

Table 3: Sex (individual responses only)	
Female	38
Male	23
Prefer not to say	1
Not stated	6
Total	68

Countries of Birth

Table 4a shows the country of birth of individual respondents from your diocese. As expected, a large number of respondents (78%) were born in Australia. Just under nine per cent came from other countries, while around 13 per cent did not state their birthplace. Table 4b provides a summary of the countries of birth by English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries*, while Tables 4c and 4d indicate the countries of birth of the respondent's mother and father respectively.

Table 4a: Countries of birth (individual responses only)		
	N	%
Australia	53	77.9
Canada	1	1.5
Ireland	1	1.5
Russia Federation	1	1.5
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	3	4.4
Not stated	9	13.2
Total	68	100.0

Table 4b: Country of birth - Summary (individual responses only)		
	N	%
Australia	53	77.9
Other English-speaking country	5	7.4
Non-English-speaking country	1	1.5
Not stated	9	13.2
Total	68	100.0

Table 4c: Mother's country of birth (individual responses only)		
	N	%
Australia	51	75.0
Other English speaking country	4	5.9
Non-English speaking country	2	2.9
Not stated	11	16.2
Total	68	100.0

Table 4d: Father's country of birth (individual responses only)		
	N	%
Australia	51	75.0
Other English-speaking country	5	7.4
Non-English-speaking country	2	2.9
Not stated	10	14.7
Total	68	100.0

* Other than Australia, English-speaking countries refer to New Zealand, United Kingdom, Ireland, United States, Canada and South Africa. All other countries are designated as non-English-speaking countries.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Table 5 shows the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from your diocese who made submissions. At the close of submissions there was one individual who identified themselves in this way, representing just over one per cent of all individual respondents.

Table 5: Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (individual responses only)	
Yes	1
No	57
Not stated	10
Total	68

Religion of Respondents

The religion question was answered by individual respondents only. Of the total 68 individual submissions that were received from your diocese, 57 respondents (84%) were Catholic. Two respondents were from other Christian denominations while there were none from non-Christian religions. A further nine respondents did not state their religion and no respondents chose the 'no religion' response.

Table 6: Religion (individual responses only)		Person	Percent
Catholic		57	83.8
Other Christian:			
Orthodox		1	1.5
Uniting Church		1	1.5
Non Christian:			
Other religion		0	0.0
No religion		0	0.0
Not stated		9	13.2
Total		68	100

For those who indicated that 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 47 respondents indicated that they went to Mass regularly and were involved in other church activities. There were four respondents who said they went to Mass and church activities sometimes, while one respondent considered themselves Catholic but described their participation in other terms. A further five respondents described themselves in another way or did not answer the question.

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	32	15	0	47
I am Catholic and go to Mass and church activities sometimes	2	2	0	4
I am Catholic, but I don't practise or get involved in anything	0	0	0	0
I consider myself Catholic but I am not sure what to think about the Catholic faith	1	0	0	1
Other	2	2	0	4
Not stated	0	1	0	1
Total	37	20	0	57

GROUP SUBMISSIONS

At the close of the survey on 13 March, there were a total of 31 group submissions made from your diocese. Around 4,910 individuals were represented through these groups. However, there were five groups that did not report their number of participating members, indicating that the total number of people represented through the group submissions may be higher.

While 24 group submissions provided a group name, seven did not do so. Table 8 shows a list of the Top 20 group submissions from the diocese with the number of members in each group. A complete list of groups is provided as *Appendix 1*. Groups that did not provide a name were omitted from this table. 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 St Nicholas Catholic Church, Tamworth with around 2,300 members. There were also a number of other parish and school groups such as the St Philomenas School, Moree with 35 participants and Uralla & Walcha parishes with 30 members. There were six other groups with 13 members or more.

Table 8 : Group submissions from the diocese

Name of group	Group size
St Nicholas Catholic Church Tamworth	2,300
St Philomena's School, Moree	35
Uralla & Walcha Parishes	30
St Patrick's Parish Council	20
St. Mary's Parish, Bingara	16
St Edward's Parish Family Group	15
St John's Parish, Barraba	15
Religious women in Rural Diocese	13
St. Josephs School	13
"St Michael's Manilla Parish group"	11
Armidale	11
Armidale Cathedral Plenary Council Group	10
Narrabri Parish	10
One of the Dialogue and Listening Groups from South Tamworth Parish	9
Sts Mary and Joseph Cathedral parishioners	9
Armidale menALIVE	8
Emmanuel spiritual Direction Community	8
The Thursday Group. Sacred Heart Parish Inverell.	8
St Edwards Conference, St Vincent De Paul	7
Uralla Parish Council	7

Age and Sex of Group Members

On 5 November 2018, a question was added to the survey asking group respondents to estimate the ages and sex of members 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 to 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 2,014 members. This was followed by the group aged 70 and over with 719 members. There was no age provided for around 252 group members.

Table 9: Estimates of ages of people in group submissions	
<i>(group responses - for submissions received after 04 November 2018 only)</i>	
Under 20 years	305
20 - 29 years	518
30 - 49 years	844
50 - 69 years	2,014
70 and over	719
Unknown	252
Total	4,652

Totals in tables 9 & 10 will not always agree due to submission errors.

Of the total 4,902 group members whose sex was reported, 65 per cent (3,192) were female and 35 per cent (1,710) were male.

Table 10: Estimates of sex of people in group submissions	
<i>(group responses - for submissions received after 04 November 2018 only)</i>	
Female	3,192
Male	1,710
Total	4,902

Totals in tables 9 & 10 will not always agree due to submission errors.



RESPONSES TO QUESTION 1

*What do you think God is
asking of us
in Australia at this time?*

THEMES DISCUSSED IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION 1

A number of themes emerged nationally in Phase One of the Plenary Council project. These are described in the national report titled, *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying: Final Report for the Plenary Council Phase I: Listening and Dialogue* published in July 2019.

A wide range of themes were discussed in the submissions from groups and individuals in your dioceses. The most prominent ones are listed below. For a detailed analysis of each of these themes please refer to the **national report**. We have provided references to the report by way of chapter and page numbers for this purpose.

The top five topics discussed by participants from your diocese were:

- Love God, Love Neighbour
- Sacraments
- Leadership and Church Governance
- Social Justice and the Environment
- The Mass

Within each of these five areas, the most widely discussed themes were as follows:

- Love God, Love Neighbour (Chapter 4)
 - *Greater trust, faith and hope in God (p. 29)*
 - *Greater focus on Jesus Christ (p. 30)*
 - *Better faith formation (p. 38)*
 - *Greater focus on the Word of God (p. 31)*
 - *Remaining faithful to Church teaching (p. 32)*
- Leadership and Church Governance (Chapter 7)
 - *Ending clericalism (p. 80)*
 - *Greater involvement of the laity (p. 84)*
 - *Greater role for women (p. 83)*
 - *Better selection and formation of candidates to priesthood (p. 90)*
 - *New leadership and governance model (p. 91)*
 - *Youth to be involved more (p. 86)*
- Sacraments (Chapter 6)
 - *Holy Orders – Ending celibacy / allowing priests to marry (p. 66)*
 - *Holy Orders - Ordination of women (p. 69)*
 - *Restoring the Third Rite of Reconciliation (p. 75)*
 - *Concerns regarding overseas priests (p. 71)*
 - *Greater emphasis on prayer and sacraments (p. 64)*
- The Mass (Chapter 5)
 - *Inclusion of the divorced and remarried (p. 46)*
 - *Greater attention to music (p. 53)*
 - *On the annulment process (p. 48)*

- Social Justice and the Environment (Chapter 9)
 - *Greater inclusion of all* (p. 108)
 - *Ending discrimination of LGBTI* (p. 110)
 - *Care for the family* (p. 115)

Other main themes that emerged from the responses from your diocese included:

- *Modernise Church teachings* (p. 169)
- *Outreach to youth* (p. 124)
- *More transparency and accountability regarding clergy sexual abuse* (p. 102)
- *Radical change, a new order, inverted pyramid* (p. 172)

SUBMISSIONS MADE IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION 1

The submissions in this section were made in response to the first question: *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?*

In keeping with ethics guidelines of the online survey, 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, 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, the submissions that follow are only from those individuals or groups who consented to having their submission being made public and being shared with their diocese. About 36 per cent of all responses did not have consent for one or both of these criteria and therefore, their submissions have not been included here.

What is Christ saying through the Spirit? "Come back to me!" Deuteronomy 6:4 / Mark 12:29
"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one" Talking about Love, is not love when it's void of Justice, Mercy and Truth:- Justice, of God the Father. Mercy, of Jesus Christ. Truth, through the Holy Spirit. One, True, Triune and Incorruptible God. He who is what Love really is, author and giver. Unfortunately the word love has been used as a cloak for every vice, and it's using your same language to draw souls away from a Just Father, a Merciful Son, and the Truth that comes from the Holy Spirit. My generation (the young) are drowning in an abundance of vices and lies, primarily through the fake lives and bad examples on Television. It is very disappointing that the Shepherds of Christ's Church seem to not notice the Wolves, or their tactics. Your flock is scattered, and there is no unity. Just ask your own parishioners about simple teachings like "What is the Eucharist?" "Heaven and Hell?" "Purgatory and Judgement?" Go back, go back to Tradition, back to the Scriptures. Go back to true veneration and respect for the Holy Eucharist. Our faith is not a contradicting one, and neither is our God, the only true God. They talk of love but do not defend truth. This is unjust, and the Church (claiming to be merciful) is in reality robbed of mercy (empty confessionals). It is robbed of Mercy because you cannot have mercy on the innocent, or forgive the justified, these are oxymorons. If there is no Sin, there is no Mercy. If there is no Mercy, then souls are trapped in their Sins, without Hope, and their sins get worse! Because sin never stops, not unless that person turns to Christ in the sacraments. It's the denial of 'Original Sin' which of course is why we need and were promised a Redeemer. When men say 'Born this way'They deny 'Original Sin'. Accompaniment refuses to separate the Sin and the Sinner. It's a charade to validate sin. That is Unjust, Unmerciful, and it is Untruthful (Deceitful). John 8:24 "You are of this world; I am not of this world. That is why I told you that you would die in your sins. For

unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." Every time you water down the faith, make it more appealing to society, and refuse to defend the truths in it. Christ is abandoned and His Church becomes more and more empty. Luke 6:26 "Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets."

Plenary Council 2020 What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time? A reinterpretation of the Christian message "the need for a new image of God, the quest for a practically-engaged spirituality appropriate to the needs of the contemporary world—all themes, not merely worked out intellectually but experientially rooted and developed through daily pastoral contacts with people from very different religious, cultural and social backgrounds" (Ursula King 'Spirit of Fire' 1996 pg66). Reinterpretation of the Christian message—change focus from the salvific model. Rather than God demanding the blood of his son to appease for the sins of mankind. Jesus came to live and love which might ultimately lead to the cross. New image of God. The old punitive grandfather image of God is still alive. Thomas Aquinas tells us if we have a false image of God then we will misunderstand the whole of Christianity. Instead of issuing negative statement like not looking at changing doctrine or tradition. Can we risk creative re-imagining? John 1-14 e.g. instead of 'Father' use, 'Creator God, source of all being'. Themes worked out experientially. "What we have seen and touched, felt and heard....." St. John. How to become a synodal Church? "One of the key goals of the Plenary Council 2020 is "To learn to become a synodal Church where mission, ministry, leadership and decision making are shared across the whole faithful people of God' How will this become a reality? In theory it sounds obvious but the challenge is how to make this a reality? Structural change is essential for the Plenary Council, Parish Councils, for the choice of bishops etc. We need appropriate levels of responsibility, accountability and transparency, e.g. research the Anglican process for the selection of bishops (priest and two lay members from each parish come together to discern appropriate candidates for leadership in the diocese.) A practically engaged spirituality appropriate to needs... Liturgy to be linked to the reality and circumstances of the people, e.g. adapt readings in retirement home, children in schools, prisons etc. Flexibility in celebrating liturgy—inclusion of the arts (drama, music, poetry, art, and dance) inclusion of contemporary texts. Have simple language (revert to former text). The liturgy to be open to adapt according to circumstances and needs. Evaluating decision-making procedures. This should represent the whole Church. At present, ordination and decision making are linked and do NOT represent the People of God. How to circumvent this impasse? Break the nexus between ordination and decision making. Ordain women and married men so the decision making-is more representative of the wider community. Appoint women as Cardinals and in key positions in the Curia, and at all levels throughout dioceses.

I feel God is asking of me that there be more equality in the Catholic Church, gender equality that is. I have always wanted to become a Catholic priest but what holds me back is the fact that priests cannot marry. It is not natural for a man (or a woman to go against their natural desires). If priests whether that be male or female should be able to marry. I also feel priest should be allowed to follow their sexuality.

To model His love to everyone in the world. To be people of love, charity and hope, not a group of in-fighting, secret keeping, snobbish hypocritical, unapproachable men (and women) who are more concerned with following human made rules than his Commandments.

Why has the Mass been hijacked by musical groups?
Quite simply to be a better Australian Catholic Church than we have been in the last 200 odd years.
<p>Plenary Submissions YOUNG CATHOLICS: Future in the young people. Need to be open to the needs of the young. Share our practice and faith. Our practice is not reaching the young. The Church is straight-laced in forgiving others. Needs to be more welcoming with appropriate ministries for youth. LOSS OF TRUST OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS: People have lost faith in institutions. Loss of faith in Catholic Church, schools. We need to maintain our faith and reach out to the lapsed, angry and disillusioned Catholics. We need to look at new ways of being Church to meet the people where they are. Society has changed and people have it good these days. People's needs are fulfilled through material needs. People don't believe in God; they had faith in the depression and in times of great need. CATHOLIC ROOTS: We need to rediscover and share our Catholic roots through the sacraments, Tradition and scripture. Confession: we receive grace when we confess. We need to confess when a priest available. CATHOLICS NEED TO BE BETTER INFORMED ON THEIR FAITH: Catholics need ongoing formation; for example in the nature of the sacraments and contraception. PRIESTS: should be allowed to be married in the future with the hope of increasing vocations. Parishes should be able to hold a Communion Service in the absence of the priest. INCLUSIVITY: We need to be mindful of the local context of the parish and worship with the people's needs in mind. DIVORCED CATHOLICS: Divorced Catholics have great difficulty in getting an annulment. The moral dilemma of divorced / remarried Catholics receiving Communion. OVERSEAS PRIESTS: Overseas born priests, whilst appreciating the generosity and goodwill of these priests, some are quite hard to understand and some older parishioners are missing Mass because of this. These men are not to be blamed, but the entire enterprise has done little or no good for them as human beings or as priests for the people to whom they were sent to serve as gifts of faith. This is where the requests for priests to marry if they so desire, and have families as do most of humanity, so they experience life as we do, probably initially would be older Australians who may be or have been married. CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: Catholic schools should be family oriented and none of this gender fluid business that is being put in the curriculum of the state school. CLERICALISM: There is too much being power being held unto, resorting in secrecy. God must be wanting us all even the hierarchy to be more transparent and will be accountable. Also the clerical robes should be less ostentatious.</p>
<p>The Catholic Church today should help people lead a good life. Help one another, keep the 10 commandments, do the best in their career, be honest and hard working. I didn't find the changes to the Mass responses helpful in any way—only distracting and didn't get an extra person to Mass. The Pope doesn't want female priests but if there are not enough male vocations I cannot see that excluding half of the population is the right thing to do. The Church must teach. More preparation for marriage instruction. More of Jesus' parables and less gospels on ancient disputes which have no relevance today.</p>
<p>1) Lay people need to become more active in the Church 2) There is a need for parents to be encouraged to bring more children into Catholic education. 3) Bad happenings have tainted the reputation of the Church; therefore, the whole Church needs more transparency and openness.</p>

There should be no situation that leads to abuse. 4) Review of the liturgy within the Church. Some good things have been lost but some changes have been for the better.

I believe that God is asking us to return to the basic gospel message: That we love the Lord our God with our whole heart and our whole soul and our whole mind and that we love our neighbour as we love ourselves. This is continually stressed by Jesus I have come to give the good news.....sight to the blind.... free the captives And He says the judgement will be I was hungry and you fed me I was thirsty and you gave me drink.....etc. He also stressed that He had come for the sick, the broken, the lost and the children ... the ones that we exclude by our legalism and emphasis on Church law. Nowhere does Jesus say you will be judged on how well you abide to the teachings of future theologians who claim that my people, God's works of Art, are sinful by origin, or by how well you keep Canon Law. In fact He was derisive of the scribes and Pharisees "whitened sepulchres". I believe that God is asking us to be compassionate and inclusive particularly to those who have been excluded from Communion because of a failed marriage usually contracted in good faith or under a misconception. It is when these people are hurting and most in need of the comfort and the strength of the Eucharist that we as Church place an exclusion on them. Many of the Church's law and customs came into being for political reasons or to meet a threat of the time. I believe that the Church is again under threat not just from secularism but from a demand for it to be real, to be truthful, to acknowledge past failings not just in sexual abuse but in its pedantic teachings on sin... (how many meat pies were wasted at shows or sales etc. when people suddenly realised it was Friday) and the dreadful agony for parents but especially mothers of a stillborn child or a child who dies before Baptism. Church Law created a harsh judgemental God totally out of character with the biblical portrayal of a God who carries us on Eagle's Wings, who gathers us as a mother hen gathers her chickens. I can assure you that "Limbo" is not a comfort to a grieving parent. We have to be welcoming and invite all people to be part of the wonderful movement that Jesus founded which has so much to offer and challenges all to be as St Irenaeus said all those centuries ago "The Glory of God is the person fully alive."

To look honestly at the current Church and its effectiveness in dealing with numerous and significant real life issues.

More Australian Priests—option of marriage. Extending role of women. Refer additional material at end.

Love my neighbour. To move away from a hierarchical model of Church towards a synodal "People of God" model with more active lay participation, involvement and responsibility for the Church.

To be an all-inclusive Church. Encouraging younger people to participate without alienating the older generation who have been the backbone of the Church for so many years. To make the Church a welcoming environment to people of all ages, backgrounds and ethnic heritage. Is our Church reflecting contemporary Australia? Do we only see Church as a building where we gather on Sunday or is it also part of our lives at home, work or school and how can we make it more important in our lives? Do we see Church the way Jesus spoke about it or do we have too many rules that are excluding people from experiencing the "community" of Church? Is the Church relevant in our society today? Are we able to "stand up" for the Church in the midst of negative media attention and general public opinion of the irrelevance of religion in today's society?

What God is asking of us is perhaps to go back to the Gospel and re-discover the message that Jesus was giving. It has all become so complicated over the centuries with accretions like indulgences, Holy Doors, liturgies just read out of books, creeds that were written centuries ago and never revised or added to, man-made Canon Law and so on. God is asking us to learn about the wonderful new insights in recent theology, the links between the environment and spirituality and the re-awakening of imagination in our sometimes stultified prayers. Perhaps God is asking us to take seriously the insights of Pope Francis in his encyclicals, particularly *Laudato Si'*.

To encourage youth and parents who send their children to Catholic schools BUT don't attend Mass—perhaps more joyful music and the children who play musical instruments. Allow priests to marry if they so wish (a wife and children, relate to people—I see that as a good thing). The homily—Jesus spoke in parables so the people could relate. We need the readings & Gospels to be then related to everyday life in Australia to get the message across clearer and more interesting, some priests do, most don't. E.g. Last ANZAC DAY 100 years since WW1—very special to Aussies, a homily was given about Gospel and at the end the ANZAC's got one sentence!!!! Listen but don't dismiss suggestions by parish councils & liturgy groups—we are trying to encourage people to come. Prayers of the faithful—a good thing but allow to add things relevant at that time e.g. bush fires, floods and drought. And any major upsets or as I am in a country town—like when a bad accident happens like in cars or burnt house, a murder etc. even if they don't belong to the Church. It affects most of the community I think it's very sad they aren't even mentioned. And for all to pray and trust in the Lord.

That the Church should be one i.e. a community of the people of God where members are respected as active and contributing, where their knowledge and skills are utilised appropriately, where distinctions between members are minimalised. Where members have roles appropriate to their abilities, skills, experiences and capacity to exercise such roles, where the distinction between ordained and lay is not hierarchical but respectfully reciprocal. Where members have a say in the appointment of their ministers and bishops, (avoiding secrecy and the lottery of appointments where only ordained are consulted and Vatican approval are sought). Where the people of God assemble in community celebrating the Eucharist, praying together, participating appropriately in the sacraments, making decisions appropriate to their community, gathering for social support and administering care and support internally and to those marginalised and distanced from the practice of their faith and prevented from participation by outmoded practices and, canon law. Where there is a sense of togetherness ('Behold how these Christians love one and other') and adhesion. Where differences can be discussed without fear or restriction due to clericalism or even laicism. Where liturgy and celebration is appropriate to the members (age, life experience, health, abilities—one form of and the language of Eucharistic celebration is not always most appropriate).

I think God is asking us to be bold and fight for the truth. We have one canonised saint in Australia. ONE. If Heaven is not for cowards, where are our Australian saints? I am sick and tired of hearing 'God is love'. Yep, I know God is love but give us more! What is love? Love of what? Love is three things: justice, mercy and truth. Not this false mercy where forgiveness is used as permission to sin (accompaniment). Our Blessed Mother, our most powerful intercessor, is calling us, begging us to return to Our Lord. I'm sick of the half-truths propagated by those who are

supposed to boldly preach, fight for and defend the truth from the pulpit! We have lost the sense of sin, stemming from the loss of moral absolutes in Australia and in our families. All the Church's problems flow from this. In the regional city I come from, we are fortunate enough to have three Catholic parishes. Unfortunately, there are three time slots for confession and more unfortunately, those three time slots for me are taken up by shift work. I must admit, our beautiful priests are willing to hear confession by appointment, but it would be nice to have more time slots for confession—preferably before Mass as there is no point going to confession after Mass for obvious reasons. I would love to acknowledge the beautiful priests in [-] for providing daily Mass in every single parish. We also have a priest who allows a CD of the rosary to play before Mass which I think is vitally important. There is also a parishioner who has established weekly adoration in two of the three parishes which is also important. I understand that our priests are overworked and there a few men joining seminaries and becoming priests, but we should be fighting the world with everything we have. I would like to also see a return to tradition. My husband and I were married on February 16th this year and we had kneeling rails for our nuptial Mass. Being the bride and seated at the front of the church I watched people receiving holy communion. The majority of people knelt and received our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist on the tongue, one woman was veiled. The photographers caught this beautiful sight on camera and I am willing—if all people in the photo allow—to send you a photo of this beautiful encounter. True faith is missing in the hearts of many because the Church in Australia (and throughout the world) has become a copy of the world. We are called to be a light in the darkness, a sign of contradiction to the world. If we are a copy of the Protestant Churches that do not have the Eucharist, why would anyone convert to the Catholic faith? A return to sacred scripture, tradition and the writings of the saints would be in the Catholic Church's best interest.

For all members—clergy and laity—to keep Jesus Christ as the model especially in relationships with each other and in our searching for God's truth as revealed by Jesus Christ, in all Church matters. To remove the gap that has developed between the clergy and the laity. We imagine a Church where power is replaced by empowerment, where being excluded is replaced by being enabled to live life to its fullest. We imagine a Church where everyone is able to play a part in its structure and its culture. We imagine a Church where all are able to have a voice and real dialogue happens. We imagine a Church where decisions at all levels involve appropriate participation. We imagine a Church where women are celebrated as much as others for their gifts and talents.

I think God is appalled at the total breakdown of society and the complete selfishness of the majority of people in it. This can be traced back to Vatican II when so many of the rules and traditions Catholics have believed in and followed since the time Jesus handed them down to St Peter were tossed out in favour of ecumenical/protestant leanings. This is where we went wrong and it's been downhill ever since. God is begging with us to return to the traditional Church—HIS CHURCH—the Church of St Peter that stood Catholics well for so many centuries. Vatican II destroyed the Church. Be in no doubt about this. It's time we recognised the incredible damage this Council did to our Church and our faith and return to the traditional teachings of the Church that drew people to God for so many centuries. Vatican II allowed entry to Protestants, Lutherans, Masons—all of who had an agenda to destroy the Catholic Church. And boy, did they succeed. Accept the fact Vatican II is responsible for the disastrous situation the Church finds herself in

today and start working out how to turn things around. Return to the traditional teachings, the teachings handed down by God through His Son, Jesus.

To help the Church "move with the times", keeping sacred our practices while recognising it isn't the same world of 100 years ago. We scare our young away with too many rules, lessons before marriage, come to church or I won't baptise your child, if we can't be accepting when they come to us as they begin their lives together we will never see them (or their family) again. We need to be inclusive, accepting. Re-visit the teaching on divorce, not everyone has the choice in a divorce, till death parts us isn't the same in these times, in old times lifespans, illness made sure of that and now we are turning away the faithful who no longer feel welcomed and accepted by the Church. Current events have only put a bigger shadow over the Church in Australia, it is time the Church stopped being so behind the times, actually deal with these foul men who hide behind their robes, step up, own it and get rid of them, they are not priests and they undermine our faith and every other priest is dragged down with them.

Following various groupings of people (with likeness in where they sit with their faith journey), various responses were recorded. Groupings covered demographics such as: non-Catholics (all ages), newly converted Catholics, those who regularly attended Mass in recent years and no longer do this (all with reason), regular Mass-attending people, young Catholics (non-practising, but have a faith and understanding through their recent education in Catholic schools). Despite the diversity in groupings, some common themes emerged. All group responses (brainstorming) will be attached at the end of the submission. Common themes:

- *the need for inclusion of everyone.

- *a Church that reflects the realities of our society (a more contemporary Church)—IVF, same sex marriage, priests being able to marry, female priests....

- *priests who are culturally aware of the communities in which they live (or greater support for them to understand).

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

- *more Christian, less religious.

- *transparency.

- *change the mould of how a Catholic "looks" and "should behave"—still some perception of Catholics as the 20th Century face of the Church.

- *move away from the "one size fits all" approach.

- *"community" and "unity".

- *an increase in youth involvement—reignite the "spark".

God is asking us to faithfully make suggestions as to how to revitalise the Catholic Church in Australia. God realises the Catholic Church is in ashes, has lost its way, has lost its moral compass and lacks authority to speak confidently on any moral, social, economic or environmental issue. The Church is in urgent need of spiritual and temporal reform and a return to faithfulness and

spirituality as revealed in the Bible. As Catholics and Christians need to walk in the footsteps of Christ not in the footsteps of men who have lead us away from Christ's message of love and forgiveness.

To show to the world our truly compassionate, humane, caring, non-materialistic, spiritual aspects of our wonderful faith. To encourage the marginalised, the lost, the hurting, the disenchanted to test us and find these responses instead of what many see as managerial, uncompassionate responses.

I think God is asking us to go back to the scriptures and discern again the message of the "servant" Jesus. In the wake of the sex abuse crisis, and the use of refugees as political footballs, we need to once again revisit the Good News. Here we will find that we have strayed too far from the two main commandments of Jesus—Love of God and Love of neighbour. The institutional Church has become too obsessed with power and rules and forgotten the "cry of the poor". (cf uploaded document at end of submission for details)

To be less judgemental and more flexible; to allow gender equality in ministerial and pastoral roles; to be inclusive and welcoming of divorcees, same sex marriage and marriages outside the church; to allow priests to marry and to welcome back to their priestly ministry those who have left the priesthood to marry; to have greater opportunity/commitment to increase spirituality through adoration.

I think that if a Catholic marries a non-baptized person they should be able to be married by a priest in a place other than a church if they choose—such as a garden. The Catholic Church does not recognize this union anyway so I think it is arrogant for the Church to expect the couple to be married in a Catholic Church—for what purpose? Because of the strict rules in our diocese many young people are choosing a celebrant rather than a priest simply as they would like a garden wedding. This is a missed opportunity for our priests to have some contact with young couples over an outdated view that all marriages should be in a church.

Look after and encourage our children and youth to make them more welcome. We seem to be losing them and they are our future. I think they should be more involved in our celebration of the Mass, not everyone but we seemed to have lost children participating in our Mass. In our parish we have four, and probably more, young women who have been deserted by their husbands who have very strong faith and are lost and lonely. They are welcomed and loved by the parish community. They need companionship but their children would be upset if annulment proceedings were started. There must be a better solution for them. We need to return to the gospel message and get rid of some of the man-made laws, e.g. Limbo, which has caused some much heartache and distress to so many people, especially mothers, even taking their guilt to their graves.

God is asking us to drastically change—urgently change—to include PEOPLE who have a vocation: be they women, married men, divorced people, LGBTQI people, to the priesthood and all decision making levels in the Church. God is asking us to ask forgiveness for the evil done to the families and children of clergy sexual abuse and to compensate these people generously. God is asking us to accept people made in His image including LGBTQI people into our faith communities. God is

asking us to get out of people's bedrooms and not make laws on contraception, sex, divorce. God is asking us to love one another. Then our faith communities can truly build again.
To pray more.
To come back to the mission of the Church—to evangelise by truly walking the talk. Encourage Alpha programs to outreach to new parishioners or friends and family. Alpha programs to current parishioners to enable them a chance to experience the Holy Spirit in their lives. Conduct adult formation—this has been missed by whole generations. Adult formation alongside sacramental preparation of children. Ask the question “Why do you want to join our Church?” We don't just “do” the children in sacraments it's a whole family faith formation—do you want to undertake that or not? If you join our Church we want you to join in not just attend. Sitting in a garage doesn't make you a car; neither does sitting in a church make you a Christian. Music is a great key for worship—provide a variety of types of music at Mass or at different Masses if there are objections. Contemporary music is available and older people do enjoy it too!
I think that God is asking for all parishes for there to be an annual PARISH RETREAT, given by a visiting well-trained spiritual director (priest, religious, or lay person/s). I feel there is a hunger for a true spiritual experience of our loving God in prayer. An extra “bonus” of such parish retreats could be the long-awaited re-discovery of praying the sacred scriptures, as hoped for by the bishops of the 2nd Vatican council, expressed in the document on Revelation (Dei Verbum) n.21. “in the sacred books, the Father...meets His children with great love and speaks with them,, the force and power in the word of God is so great that it remains ...the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life”.
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 others? 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. But why? Why are we asked these things, at this time? Because, at our core, what is it to be Christian? Did Christ come to build wealth, to exclude others, to judge, to push the broken away? Or, rather, did Christ come to lead us on a different path? A path towards understanding, compassion and care, a path where each step is to be always taken with love—a path walked with others. The call in my ears is return to the core—to live the gospel—indeed live the fifth gospel, a gospel that is lived now, that is true to Christ. At this time, we live in a society where information is no longer for the few—previously, the Church's rules may have served to guide (and oppress) the ignorant. However, some such rules and doctrine are an accretion on truth. Rather than showing us how to live, such things show us how to judge, to condemn. Today, Christ is vital to our lives. Because in this time, we need guidance on how to live, how to enact discernment, how to make powerful, positive choices.
To be more welcoming; to choose our bishops and priests wisely.
I strongly believe that God is testing us and wants us to examine our faith and what is at its core. It appears that we have become overconfident in our own ability to control our lives. People have lost any sense of spirituality and believe this to be the intelligent way to live. While this works for

many, it also places many people in a search of something and they don't really know what they are searching for. Their lives are empty and without purpose. They are unable to relate to their fellow man and they have no faith in the goodness of man. We are being tested, God wants us to go back to the three years Jesus was with us, read and think about what he said. Attempt to live it and we will be able to live more fulfilled lives.

To be brave and courageous in these troubled times. God is asking us not to forsake him and the teachings of Jesus, to be kind and understanding to all.

More what I'm asking God.

To love and respect others. Celebrate diversity. Welcome others.

We feel that the Church in Australia is being called to acknowledge and accept all people as being created in the image and likeness of God. This means that the Church is called to be inclusive and accepting of all people, regardless of circumstance.

God is asking us to embrace the Plenary Council, called through the Holy Spirit. Self-critique is vital at all levels in this process; current Church realities and effectiveness have been identified as pivotal areas; it seems crucial to acknowledge the needs being met and identifying those that are not. The Church must come out to meet the wider community and that is dependent on each member being open of heart. It is up to each of us. We need to make windows of opportunity to engage with newcomers on a one-to-one basis, opening our hearts and our homes. The child abuse scandals have taxed the Church membership at all levels – all Church entities have been tainted and are bearing the grief. We are appalled at the question mark placed by the wider society over all the faithful. This matter must be a target for our future and we should do all we can to provide safe futures for our children, the next generation of the people of God. This abuse should be extended to include the human failures of incest, emotional and verbal abuse, domestic violence and bullying in our communities. May non-offending clergy remain strong in their convictions and not held to ridicule in the future. Our faith is very personal and not dependent on the clergy alone but on our relationship with the Risen Christ. All groups within the Church life need to remain firm and steadfast in their faith in the future, in the knowledge of their being loved into being by a generous and merciful God. The Church must recognise the contributions made by women across the centuries and in present life. Christ stopped to talk with women on his final journey to Calvary. We hope that the Plenary Council will hear the voice of women and that we will walk a path that is inclusive and embracing of all. School leavers find the lack of inclusivity of women in the voice of the Church presents the organisational Church as irrelevant, particularly in the eyes of youth. May school leavers go forth in life with an unbridled passion for the way of Jesus in the future. May they declare themselves for Christ and provide a spiritual and practical example to others. May parents and godparents be role models for our youth. May church services be uplifting for all and enhance our spiritual journey. The music is strong but not music that attracts youth. Other arts are not encouraged to be used in the Church community here. May all those who have been baptised, remain, and grow in the Church community. Many families are broken or reconstituted in our society and these situations may present difficulties for their sacramental journey. For those from the LGBTI community there is a lack of acceptance and understanding from our Churches so that they will always feel ostracised and unwilling to belong.

By our example of spiritual and social justice matters, may we erode secularism, apathy and bring lost Catholics back to enjoy the Good News in the Church community.

##There is a great Australian yearning for spirituality where an understanding of all aspects of our Indigenous and multicultural nation can enhance and lead to a deeper understanding and embracing of the nature of Christ in our midst. It is a wish that Australian Catholics could learn and engage more through dialogue with the First Peoples of our nation who have embraced Jesus Christ. They can open our eyes to their understanding of the sacredness of their incorporation of Jesus into their ongoing Dreaming through their connectedness with each other and with the land. The beautiful Aboriginal Christian artworks and embellished rituals that may accompany Masses can help deepen our understanding and love of Christ—his suffering, his compassion and his forgiveness—and our own personal relationship with Him. As an Australian Church we have been greatly influenced by those from other cultures and faiths in our multicultural society. We have priests from other lands as missionaries to us, we have new immigrants, students and refugees who come to our doors. Through dialogue and celebrations of new culture we can enhance the diversity of our liturgy to incorporate many aspects of our new Australian brothers and sisters' hymns and practices into our worship.

We imagine a Church like that of the Early Church Communities where we gather together in Jesus' name, we share the gospel and we break bread and share this Eucharist before taking Christ out to serve others. We become one with Christ and we go out in Christ's name. Our liturgy must thus lift us up to God. Thus everything in liturgy must lift us up—help us to pray—to come to the union with God. We cannot love others without receiving love from Christ first; any other love but His is superficial and shallow. The liturgy brings us to Christ; after that we can turn to the other and give him/her what we received. Our liturgy should reflect "being lifted up towards God by beauty" as in some of the oldest Church documents—the Liturgy of St James and the Didache. In Sacrosanctum Concilium from Vatican II, the reverence and solemnity of the Liturgy is stressed. The richness of our tradition should be celebrated in music and prayer that is uplifting—Gregorian chants, instrumental pieces, the importance of silences, the inclusion of Latin. All must serve to deepen reverence and prayer.

I feel that God is calling the Church in Australia to be more authentic and relevant in how it celebrates and lives the faith in action in the wider community. We are being called to "live the joy of the Gospel"—to share the mission. Adult laity needs formation and training so as to be able to take their rightful place in areas of ministry and service in the community. There needs to be adult faith education. The area of priestly ministry needs to be looked at and possibly opened up in new ways—married priests, voluntary celibacy, short term vows for ministry, leaders selected by the community from the local community to serve as priest for short periods. Authentic and culturally relevant celebration of the liturgy using Australian symbols in the Australian context—less clericalism, legalistic liturgical celebration to more pastoral liturgical celebration which speaks to the local community. I feel that the Church is being called to free the priests from some administrative tasks to allow them to be more available for pastoral and spiritual matters. Some areas of parish governance may be able to be overseen by lay parish managers with supervision by the priest. I feel the Church is being called to address pastorally the issue of re-admission of

divorced and remarried Catholics to the sacraments and the sense of inclusion and welcome to be part of the worshipping community.

To be open to the Holy Spirit, to be repentant, remorseful and sorrowful for the abuse of children.

To become aware the Catholic Church has lost the trust of a vast and often silent majority of Catholics. To show our sadness and sorrow by a year, (better still a decade) of Repentance. To become deeply aware that we, (the people of God), are the Church—not only the hierarchy. They are here to guide us to listen and actively live the Word of God as Jesus did, leading by example. To stop hiding behind Canon law and playing ducks and drakes with the Laws of Australia. For the hierarchy to drop the arrogant stance that was never part of Jesus' example.

God is asking us to turn our hearts to Him, to recognise His love and as a result of walking in his love be an open and willing witness to others. God is asking us to speak the truth in love, to share the Good News. God is asking us to be the witness to today's world that the Church has been to each generation for 2000 years. We need to be willing to stand out, to be different, to be in the world but not of the world. The world needs to be able to distinguish between those who follow Christ and those who do not. As believers, our lives will witness love to every person. God is asking the Church to continue to stand against the evils of this world, to be the voice of Christ to these current generations and the future generations.

I think needs to be considered in the criteria for choosing Church Leaders. When scanning the ranks of priests for potential bishops, please be careful of choosing priests who may be on the Asperger Spectrum. They may be intelligent and look impressive but they are not wired for empathy which can cause a lot of sadness due to misunderstanding. A bishop needs to be intelligently articulate in defending the faith and show genuine pastoral empathy. It is a noted fact that Asperger men when courting a woman will promise the world but simply can't keep up the emotional demand. This can be applied to choosing a bishop. It's good to remember that a cardinal is a political appointment and doesn't have to be ordained.

I believe God is asking us to simply pray. We are asked to be the face of Christ and people of the Gospel. In modern society I believe people have disengaged with the traditional ideas of the Church. People have lost the true meaning of faith in God, and evidently attendance in a Mass has surely declined. I believe God is asking us teachers in the Catholic School system to promote evangelism and provide faith that a large majority of children are missing out on because they do not experience faith outside of the school system. Humans are creatures of habit, and if it is a common occurrence not to attend Mass, then this will continue through the chain. I believe that God is asking me to support young children and the youth to know, worship and love God and to spread the word. I believe we are asked to be stewards of God's creation especially for the land as our environments become mismanaged and overused. As we look around us, we see land taken away and the beauty of God's creation ruined to the mass production of society. God asks us as individuals and communities to work together to preserve this rich land for now and in the future. Finally, God is asking us to speak out for the Church, in light of what is happening in the Church at the moment. The Catholic Church is based on spiritual love not what reads in the media. I believe it is a time to turn to God and pray for the future of the Church and humanity.

To try and keep going through this terrible upheaval in the Catholic Church. To try and focus on our own faith and try not to let the terrible crimes that have taken place take us away from him.

Our Church needs to go back to St Paul's letter to Timothy—The Bishops' role was instituted by St Paul's letter to Timothy—3 'The Elder in Charge'. St Paul did say let's have a church group led by Elders who love their rich million-dollar properties and holiday beach houses. He did not say deacons are to live in private residences. Our parishes were led by married elders and deacons. Our bishop is saying that our parish centre is to be a private residence and is a substandard residence for our priests. He is not the leader following the guidelines set by Jesus. The Church should be led by men like those chosen and instructed by Jesus. Mark 10:41-45. We need the plenary council responses to be plain down to earth truth. Paedophile behaviour and homophobic culture in our Church is rife. What do you think is going to happen to leaders who hid this evil and let it go on and on. Our Lady said, in 1917 that WWII was a result of our sin. She said pray for priests as many are on the wrong path. I am not happy if our parish simply fills out some survey or form. Our Church needs a shakeup like an earthquake from the top down bring it in line with Christ's original message to the Apostles. The Church today seems to be a gutless organisation catering for the whims of self-important leaders who are proud to live in million-dollar bishops' houses and holiday units while ignoring the poor. E.G.—Bishop [-], as well as all the leaders around the world who preach about Jesus' message then go home to a luxury lifestyle. I watched the docs on the Popes recently and wow what a mess the power-hungry world and Popes made of our Church. Only for the saints did our Church remain alive. Mary warned us in 1917 what would happen if we did not stop sinning. The leaders of our Church today who think they are going to escape God's wrath be aware. The worst sin of all is leading a child away from God. Loving the power of office and living the high life be aware. Our leaders need to go back to school and read their bibles. Luke 9:48-50 The Church allows the assault of the media and atheist views with meek acceptance. Try that with the Muslims. We need a Church that has the courage of the early leaders who stood up to whoever was running the country and led us with authority to fight for our religious freedoms and beliefs. They would rather die than bow down and accept a wishy-washy version, so we can keep our self-indulgent affluent existence and lapdog to the politicians and leftist views. Have fun putting this in the bin and ignoring our view while you bishops pretend you are going to reform.

I think God is asking us to fill our empty churches with families.

To have a strong hard look at the reality of present day Church and not the theory, to look at how and why many things have changed and continue to change and then to seek ways to live life to the Gospel fullest as we are—men, women, children, clergy or lay, sinners and saints and all in between so that our Church can truly walk with us all on our journeys.

I believe God is asking us to step out of our box. As a faith we must evolve. We cannot stay in the past. The basic belief must stay the same, but to grow as a faith Church, we have to be flexible. Like a river bank that changes with the river's flow, so must we. We have a duty to embrace everyone into our Catholic faith. We embrace and accept all people, God will then judge. We must provide a safe place, a place of peace and non-judgemental. LGBTI people should not be judged as sinning. We all sin, but homosexuality itself is not sin. We can be spiritual without "religiosity". The rules act as guidelines, not as something to be adhered to at all cost. We need to be an inviting place filled with joy not fear, with joyful music not dowdy hymns, with the congregation

encouraged to be a part of the Mass. We need to be impeccable hosts, showing Jesus in our words and actions. We need to be a holistic Catholic Church, changing with the river flow as needed, not stagnant and petty about bible interpretation and ritual. Power and control is not man's job, that's God's job. We need to be a listening faith, a working faith, an endearing faith, loving and compassionate, never losing sight of God's vision for us. Part of the change that needs to happen is including women to have roles in the Church, married priests, as we don't have enough priests to look after the Catholic flock. We have to be like the river bank, moving with the river, whilst changing to meet the changing face of the river. If our Catholic Church doesn't become flexible, moving and evolving with its members, we can't grow, we will just shrivel up. We have Jesus, we have the Mass, we have the Holy Spirit, these things remain steadfast, as we move, weaving here and there as so directed by outward signs of love, acceptance, need and humility dictate our ever changing journey with Jesus through our Catholic Faith. Let's not get bogged down with interpretation, but open our church doors to all, making people feel welcomed and eager to stay connected.

We believe that the call of the Spirit to us in Australia today is: God is calling us to be active, joyful disciples within our various communities of faith-filled people and a calling to all people who may be fearful to admit to their beliefs and/ or lack of faith. The image that speaks to us religious women in 21st Century is Pope Francis' image of an inverted triangle. The People of God are no longer at the base but at the top, with the hierarchical structure descending to a very small base.



RESPONSES TO QUESTION 2

*What questions about the future of
the Church in Australia
would you like the
Plenary Council to consider?*

QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY COUNCIL

Participants were also asked to submit questions about the future of the Church in Australia for the Plenary Council to consider. The question put to participants was:

What questions about the future of the Church in Australia would you like the Plenary Council to consider?

Responses to this question were examined for consent both for the publishing of their de-identified submission online and for sharing their de-identified submission with their diocese. Questions were also checked for comprehension and duplicate questions were identified. From this, a sample list of questions indicative of the submissions from your diocese was developed. This list is as follows:

1. How is the Church supporting those that support it?
2. How do we hold on to our faith in a society that wants to destroy it?
3. How can the Council extend the parameters begun to fight child abuse, to fight other types of abuse?
4. Can we use piped or recorded music alongside our communal hymns if we don't have the gifts to use uplifting music?
5. What vision does the Church have to invite and welcome the lapsed Catholics back?
6. Why do some people only recognise their attendance at church at Christmas and Easter?
7. What is being done about improving the poor Catholic education our children are receiving in our "Catholic Schools"?
8. Why are family groups not a part of small communities?
9. How can the damage caused by wrong doings in the Church be rectified?
10. When is the Church going to return to the truth of the Bible and stop being afraid to stand out from the world in proclaiming truth in all areas of life?
11. How does the Church see the role of the Holy Spirit, both in personal relationships and in the Church?
12. Can we see a more practical Christianity where we do go out after receiving Christ to serve and assist those in need?
13. How can the Council extend the parameters begun to fight child abuse, to fight other types of abuse?
14. Will the Bishops' Council lobby strive for amendments to the current English language of the Mass?



RESPONSES TO QUESTION 3

*Would you like to share a story
about your experience of faith
or of the Church in Australia
that has shaped you?*

STORIES OF FAITH OR CHURCH SHARED IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION 3

The stories in this section were shared in response to the third question: *Would you like to share a story about your experience of faith or of the Church in Australia that has shaped you?*

In keeping with the guidelines of consent explained earlier in the report, these stories are only from those individuals or groups from your diocese who consented to having their submission being made public and being shared with their diocese. About 36 per cent of all responses did not have consent for one or both of these criteria and therefore, their stories have not been included here.

My personal experience of faith is this. At a Catholic high school, I learnt all about Martin Luther from a protestant view that condemned Catholicism. Claiming that as long as man believes in God he has permission to sin. Faith without Works. I learnt about Aboriginal Paganism, and the teachings of Islam. A religion by the way saints and doctors of the Catholic Church have condemned. Moreover, Islam is clearly Anti-Christ, as it clearly denies that Jesus is the Christ. Mohammed propagated this fake religion during the Arian Heresy that denied the divinity of Christ. This approx. 6th Century false prophet poor Muslims follow, received the Koran while he was asleep, with no credibility whatsoever. 1 John 2:22 "Who is the liar, if it is not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the Antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son can have the Father." Saints that boldly condemn Islam like St Perfectus, St John of Damascus, St Thomas Aquinas, and St John Bosco. John 16:2 "In fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do these things because they have not known the Father or Me" My faith has been mostly self-taught, through tradition, the saints and by hearing some good priests. I had no Catechism, faith is not taught at home, the lies of the world are seductive, and cleverly wrapped. Help us youth by turning back to Jesus Christ, back to His word, back to Tradition. Stop listening to the world, listen to Jesus' rule and discipline and be bold! It is Christ calling us back to Him. This world is drowning in (mostly) carnal vices, these same vices destroying both family and vocations. Isn't it obvious? Please go back to Jesus, back to Tradition, back to true veneration of the Holy Eucharist.

I have been involved actively with reconciliation groups, prison prayer group, working with people with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers. I am a chaplain to Kairos and meeting with women who have a family member in prison, local women's refuge, a weekly prayer and reflection group in my own home as well as giving occasional retreat days. I have been a marriage and funeral celebrant for a number of years and a member of our local Ministers' Fellowship, which organises ecumenical activities in our local area. None of these has been instigated by my local church community. This is a source of sadness to me as I would have liked to see my ministry as an outreach from my local church. Through the Church, the only activity I am involved in is being part of the welfare arm of our local St. Vincent de Paul Society.

The Catholic Church has helped me in ways I cannot describe, I used to be very loyal to the Catholic Church, but if the Catholic Church does not implement changes soon I will not come back to the Catholic Church.

I love going to Mass, it's our "greatest prayer", and yet so many Catholics are not attending Sunday Mass (or any other Mass). Those that I have spoken to or heard about think it's a burden or that they don't need to go or the recent revelations of the Royal Commission been too much and have turned them away. I too was starting to be worn down by the seemingly nonstop negativity. Then I encountered the "word on fire" website. Bishop Robert Barron's talks on the Mass (and many other things) have re invigorated my passion for our greatest prayer. Even though our Church is at the moment "under the pump" as it were, we should not keep our heads down hoping the flack will disappear, I think we should promote the Mass, inside and outside the Church. Re-explain it to the people who already go to church as I think many have forgotten over time what a great thing they are involved in. We should show it as the beautiful thing it is—our greatest prayer prayed in the very presents of Jesus Christ. I think we should promote prayer and meditation to our school students (especially high school students), get people going into our churches, not just for weddings, baptisms, funerals and Mass but also as a place of peace where they can encounter Jesus. I hope that one of the outcomes of the Plenary Council is that in this time of trouble we should get back to our spiritual basics and strengthen them amongst the still faithful to kind of plug the leaks. Then when the faithful are strong, again, we can once more spread the Word in a country and indeed world that sorely needs it.

We have educated four children and ten grandchildren in the Catholic system and we have been very satisfied.

If faith is part of one's life, challenges can be met. This was clearly demonstrated by a beautiful witnessing of one man's journey of faith supported along the way by a loving wife and family.

I have many as a woman in the Church. I don't wish to add these here. They are not good stories and basically are power play by clergy.

Women were alienated in 1960's by the Church's incompetent management of the contraceptive pill. It could have been used as birth control but nobody tried to educate the people.

Although my parents were never 'church goers' I do remember my father having us kneel down in front of the slow combustion stove and teaching us the "Our Father" when my sister and I were about 4 years old. There have been many times in my life where faith has not necessarily made things easier but it has certainly been a comfort to know that you are not alone. It is also the community aspect of Church that is very important during personal difficulties when support is offered from members of the Church community. After having 3 miscarriages, one of the difficult things to cope with was the teaching of Limbo that I was taught at school. It was a lady in our congregation who gave me support during this time by just talking to me but also giving me some reading material that I now believe that I have three fantastic children but I also have 3 that I have yet to meet. This may not have been a faith shaping moment but it certainly helped me to look at things differently to how I had been taught.

The Thursday group has been meeting weekly for a number of years for prayer, reading and discussion. The following are some of the thoughts which members have raised and which we would like to share for consideration by the Plenary Council. Most of the group have children and grandchildren who no longer find any spiritual nourishment in the Catholic Church. Members of our small group feel that our weekly gatherings are where we really experience "Church" by sharing our prayers, our hopes and through our current readings of contemporary theologians.

Born into the Catholic faith—I did slacken off in my 20's but as time went on came back. I believe the grounding of my family and teaching from school by the grace of God brought me back. Love the Mass and friendship, so special.

My childhood and youth experiences in faith and in the Church were greatly influenced by the 'Irish' faith of my parents, where rules and practice were valued to the detriment of actual spiritual development beyond the ritualised saying of prayers, attending Mass regularly, being a regular altar boy. That is the rubrics of Church rather than education in and development of understanding the faith and personal relationship with Christ. Pressure and fear were the driving force. I am grateful to my parents for their basic faith and their insistence in Church expectations. In their later life, they expressed their own dissatisfaction with the ritualised and formulaic experience of Church. Fortunately, after leaving school and home, I have had opportunities to develop faith understanding and mature practice of faith. It is now much later in life that much more understanding (tempered by lived experiences) and knowledge have been gained and more personal decision making on what is valued, important and wanting to be practised in my faith journey is exercised. Rejecting 'out-of-date' blind following of certain Church 'rules' and rituals are now comfortable to me and I feel much freer to make such decisions, while maintaining my faith and exercising my spiritual understandings and practice of faith. I believe the Church left a large period of time between imposition childhood faith through the Catholic school religion curriculum and the many opportunities to read and listen to much more enlightened explanations of faith today by great and modern theological and spiritual writers. The cliché for lay people of God was to 'pay, pray and obey' was very evident in my middle years of experiencing the institutional Church. Experience of great Eucharistic celebrations has enhance my praying the Mass, but ritual saying of the Mass still persists. Where I have experienced inclusive and collegial leadership in the Church, where the priest teaches rather than giving bland sermons and where, with fellow Catholics, we have a say and we are engaged in parish life, experience of church is much more satisfying and fulfilling.

A couple of years ago I attended the [-] women's conference in [-] with one of my friends. I knew [-] was protestant but I decided to participate in their celebration of Christ's resurrection, I thought 'what harm could it do? This conference occurred over three days and included talks by protestant pastors from around the globe, worship music and testimonies. By day two, I became overwhelmingly sad and left the conference for half a day to do 'Catholic stuff'. I witnessed just how empty their church was without iconography, priests, the altar of sacrifice, the tabernacle containing our Blessed Lord in the Eucharist, groups of people praying the rosary devoutly, references to the saints, sacred hymns and honouring our Blessed Mother, but most importantly: the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Their 'Church' was empty. I felt like I was at a music festival, not church. Please don't get me wrong, I have no doubt that the majority, if not all, women who were

present at that conference had good intentions. But, I longed to be in the presence of the Catholic Church. I missed being in the true presence of our Lord in the Eucharist. I felt at home once I stepped into the Catholic Church. I knew God was and is truly present there. It might look like these churches are the ones that are doing well and bringing a lot of people to the Christian faith, but they lack the truth. I am surrounded by protestants at work and I have lost count of how many times they say on a Sunday "I didn't feel like going to church this morning" or "we did church at home today". These people are also 'church-hopping', going from protestant church to protestant church, trying to find their 'home-church'. Why? These churches do not contain the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ. If our Church fathers boldly preach the truth of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and everything our true Catholic faith entails, how many more souls who are hungry for the truth will come 'home'? The saints are testimony of this fact. By their bold preaching and holy example, many people were converted to the true Catholic faith, including once completely pagan nations. (I understand that us lay people have to live our faith and be bold too, which is why this should also be preached).

We have one story. In 2018, [-] —an offshoot of the [-] —organised a weekend retreat for women and invited two women spiritual directors to facilitate. Both facilitators had previous experience with retreats in the diocese at parish and school level. One facilitator has been a member of the Catholic schools office retreat team for over 20 years. However, on this occasion they were invited by the clergy, priests from another culture, to meet with them and justify their program. Several changes to the program were then requested—the inclusion of Eucharistic Adoration, Reconciliation and changing the planned time of Mass being some of them. The facilitators felt that the clergy did not quite understand the needs of the women attending and where these attendees were in their connection with the Church—some of whom were feeling alienated and disenchanted. However, the changes were made. The retreat was successful despite all.

I am a faithful Catholic. I go to Mass every week. More and more, I find myself in tears during the Mass. Where is the emotion, the complete dedication to God, the beauty of the sacrifice? It seems even the priests are merely going through the motions, reciting words that have lost all significance. I feel God's pain, His despair at what His people have done to His Church. Vatican II was wrong on so many levels. It's time we recognised it and start doing something to turn our Church around. If we continue down this path, and failing divine intervention, in another fifty years the Church will cease to exist. And it will be on our heads.

I lost confidence and respect for the Church back in the 1960's when the local priest said 'Sons and Lovers' by D. H. Lawrence should be banned and no one should read it even though it was on the Catholic school's reading/study list. I also lost faith when the school principal, a brother [-], was molesting boys in front of the class of [-]. He was sent, so we were told, to Switzerland for psychological reprogramming—which was fine. But then he was sent back to Australia and became a school principal elsewhere and continued committing child sex offences. The Church while it initially acted quickly in respect to my school had moved to my school from elsewhere and did not immediately refer the allegations to the police. His sexual predatory habits apparently went unchecked by the Church for a long term. His case is on police files. What do the Church's own records show? How did it fail? My return to the faith is very recent. I follow my own version

of the Catholic faith as evidenced through the Bible, Bible study and some more modern theology. I do not always agree with statements made by the Church hierarchy where they are not Biblically based or are based on narrow, right wing, extremist views of theology.

I am a civilly divorced person who carries out a variety of ministries in the local area under the auspice of the Catholic Church. If not for one particularly wise and worldly priest I would not have considered myself worthy in any way for these ministries. I can assure you that if I were not doing these either people in their 70s and 80s (an ever-decreasing number) would be doing these, or they would not be done and vulnerable people would miss out on these important experiences. I come from a large family of eight siblings, and now well over 50 members across four generations. The vast majority of these no longer involve themselves in the Catholic sacraments or functions. Most would still call themselves Catholic, though I am not sure what that means. And it is not important that I know, but I want to be able to bring them back to practice of their faith so that is my only concern. I have nieces and nephews who have been baptised in other Christian faiths, though have attended Catholic schools. I wonder if it is to ensure the children have an education in an organisation with Christian ethos, or if it is to avoid an education in a public school system. Interestingly, for a variety of reasons, I am the only one of my siblings who attended a public high school; and one of only two whom regularly attend Mass and receive the sacraments. Amongst my family there are two members who it could be perceived have received favourable treatment from the Catholic Church. These two have remarried Catholics who were married in the Catholic Church. Their spouses have received annulments obviously, however, from the outside perspective one would wonder why as they both have children from other marriages and appear to have little issues other than a relationship breakdown with their ex-spouses. It is not my place to judge—and I am enormously happy for my siblings that they have found happiness with good people. However, the stature of these people as an ex-Principal of a Catholic school, and a senior employee in a State government office run by a high-profile Catholic person at the time does lead some to comment about the application of regulations. I do know that the characteristics of different parishes play out differently for their communities. However, there also appears to be a variety of interpretations regarding regulations. For example, the use of the Third Rite of Reconciliation. Whilst I believe this would encourage many people to return to the practice of their faith, it seems that a local priest makes the decision as to whether they endorse such practice. I am confused about where authority lies, and why it lies in different levels of governance in our Catholic Church for differing matters.

As a retired teacher, I have found it is evident that the Church is not reaching out to the youth in Australia today. Yet, young people and their families are spiritual and searching for answers. Young people also have a social conscience and very keen to be involved in things like Young Vinnies. The institutional Church just doesn't appear to answer their needs.

I have tried to be a faithful Christian in the Catholic tradition for most of my life but this has become harder and I am very disillusioned with the Church. My husband and I were regular Mass goers with our 4 children and were involved in the finance and children's liturgy committees of our parish. However, when a new migrant priest came to our parish a few years ago and insisted on installing a new \$25,000 altar in our church, when children in our local rural town were sometimes hungry, I was repulsed. Building an ornate and shining altar helped his faith, but it

didn't help ours. He came to our parish and enforced his traditions on us instead of sitting back and learning about his community. I wrote to him and he told me he wasn't responsible for my faith and he believed a new altar would bring people back to the Church. He was very wrong—the numbers have continued to decline, myself and my husband among those who are semi-regular. None of my adult children go to Mass, in fact, at Christmas, not one of them joined us this year. If there is no real change after the conviction (awaiting appeal) of George Pell the Church will have no one in its pews and our celibate Church leaders will have totally failed us all. Not all of them, but the majority who fail to share power or be brave enough to actually do something. Unless real change—not another statement—happens now, all hope seems lost. There can be no more chances—this crisis requires urgent action, when our Church has lost articulate, passionate, good women or priests who have left the priesthood because they fell in love with a man or woman, we are all the poorer. It is with great sadness that I tell my story. Faith was the essence of our families but the hypocrisy and immorality that has been exposed in the institutional Church means we can no longer find Jesus there. The evil has been more widespread than was ever imagined and has totally overshadowed the true work of God being carried out by nuns, priests and lay people in schools, hospitals and in the community. My biggest concern is that there seems to be no active desire for urgent change.

I had my first experience of the Holy Spirit at a charismatic conference when I was a young married person. It was life changing. I felt why hadn't anyone mentioned this type of experience was available before? It was not an everyday phenomenon at the local church or ever spoken of. Most people were cynical of "Charismatics". I would hope the clergy and Church could embrace this type of experience instead of tolerating it and pretending it doesn't exist. Young people are hungry for a real spiritual experience—they need to know God is real and is here and now ready for a relationship. They turn instead to magic, fortune telling, channelling etc. to get that spiritual experience. The Church is failing them.

This suggestion is made, not just "in theory", but based on my own pastoral experience: from about 1980 – 2012, at the request of a devoted catechist, I began providing an annual parish retreat wherever I was parish priest. This retreat would be given as follows. Option A: the same programme was at times conducted on both a Saturday and a Sunday e.g. 9.30am to 3 pm, to enable a Catholic married couple to take it in turns to attend a full day, while the other spouse took care of the children. Option B: a 3-day mid-week time slot (Tues, Wed, Thurs), divided between evening sessions for employed people, and daytime sessions for those not employed.

In the pit of darkness, Christ is with me. I feel it. There is genuine physical change in me, when I turn to God. When I experience God through others, life is more full. [One particular woman] has influenced my life and spirituality more than any other. Through her, the path is clearer, love is fuller and life has a deeper, sharper, clarified purpose. More than any other, she has fostered my spiritual contemplation and social action. There is a genuine, and poetic, lived Christianity, held in humour and a life lived with vigour and positive action. This has shaped me, brought me to Christ, and taught me to live. Is there any greater gift?

I married in 1975 and made a very poor choice. There followed three years and nine months of misery, anger and emotional and physical violence before I removed myself from the situation. A priest from [-] helped me by pointing out that the marriage was a tri-lateral agreement. God

would not break his word but the other two parties to the agreement might. This happened very early in the marriage and it gave me the strength to do my best until it was no longer safe or sensible to continue. On the other side of the coin another priest told me that I should go home and do my duty by my husband and put up with whatever he wanted. When the marriage was dissolved I stopped practising and remained in this state for 20 years. I then returned to the Church and it is the foundation for my life now. While I was not practising, I never lost my faith. It is a mystery to me why I had to spend so much time alone.

After not coming to Mass for 15 years, I have found a new beginning to my faith within my workplace and parish. I am proud to be part of the loving and inclusive Catholic community. They have supported me through a time of marriage separation and I feel loved again.

I grew up in a strict Catholic Church with a mother who had extremely strong belief in the Catholic faith. She had an, uncle a priest, a sister a nun, and a niece a nun. I was in the era where we were educated to fear Hell and the devil and it was a faith built on fear not love. I remember vividly as a very little girl thinking if I don't get to confession and I die I will burn in hell. My sins were innocent little nothings when I think back. I have grown up with physiological issues which relate back to this form of indoctrinate. God is love not fear, the Catholic faith were so hell bent on teaching fear [of] the Lord that they did not obviously realize what they were doing to young minds. It only takes a child that is sensitive or vulnerable to be damaged forever, like myself. In saying that I have still pursued my faith and married a Catholic and brought my 5 children up as Catholics. Approximately 9 years ago, I discovered that my eldest son had been molested by [-] when he was an altar boy at [-]. Can you imagine my horror and devastation in knowing that I had failed my boy as a protective mother. I can't even describe very well the anguish that this has caused myself and my family. Nothing can change this and a whole generation of faith in the Catholic Church has been lost. When I look back I can now remember the change in my boy who at the time had been a very devoted little boy to his prayers and religion. I could not work out as he proceeded through high school why his opinion of the Church had changed so much and why he was so angry about it. It all came to a head when he refused to get married in the Church. Devastated for him and our family I have struggled with my faith ever since and my anxiety has blown out of control on several occasions. My son is also on medication. The revelation of George Pell has just about ended me and I really don't know where to turn from here. You can say that it's not all priests but how do you trust again. I mean I went to confession to this monster [-] on many occasions. What an absolute humiliation and demoralising memory that is now. The fact that many of the other priests in this diocese knew of his behaviour and allowed it to fester makes them equally as bad. I ask you where do you go from here? I'm not a perfect person by any means and have my faults and sins but I can't get past this and I don't know how the Church is going to either.

I have had a wonderful faith journey. I grew up in a family of devout Catholics that were also generous and welcoming of all. I married a non-Catholic and he was made welcome by our parish priest. I have a brother who is a priest and I am practicing my faith by being involved with the parish, teaching scripture in State school and leading Lenten groups and being a leader and reader at Mass. I have personally experienced no crimes in my parish. My parish church is like a second home to me.

We have two stories: Experiences from our diocese of a paedophile priest have left painful memories for those with children, and especially those whose children were sexually abused. One member of our group recounted experiences of knowing this priest who had been removed from preaching but was free to attend Masses although nobody really knew why. He befriended the family and made his way into their lives. He was found to be stalking their children in inviting them out and taking photos of them. The children felt very uncomfortable and he was told not to come near them. This was long before he was finally convicted of his crimes against children as a paedophile priest. In 2012, on the anniversary of our Cathedral, the parish gave contributions to a celebratory book giving their stories of Cathedral life in their lifetime here. For many, it was the first time they had been asked about their faith journey. Among other smaller matters, they freely expressed their concern about the shortages of clergy, paedophilia cases and the need for the ordination of women. In the course of the book being vetted by the Bishop almost all references to paedophilia and the ordination of women were erased. We can no longer take this approach of power. We need to walk together, listening, discerning and praying together, as the people of God in faith and love.

Two of our group relayed their stories of an Aboriginal immersion experience to Western NSW extended to them that had an impact on their own spirituality and an urge to work towards Reconciliation. The [-] Catholic Schools Office (CSO) runs an Aboriginal Immersion Program for Catholic School teachers called "Lets Talk Dwanda" (Lets Talk Country). This program has also been extended to heads of Catholic Education Offices and even some bishops and clergy to enhance their understanding of Aboriginal Spirituality. Our diocese has a high Aboriginal population. Through "Lets Talk Dwanda", visiting and speaking with those growing up on Missions and those from the Stolen Generations, an understanding was gained of the pain of the past and present for our Indigenous brothers and sisters. These stories provided a strong sense of the need for our Church to work towards Reconciliation. The sharing of Dreaming stories, art, songs and rituals deepened our sense of Jesus' presence in the land and in the people. The spiritual experiences that this immersion provided were uplifting. Smoking fires that cleanse the body in an act of healing and reconciliation, stories that teach us basic truths about our relationships, and prayerful walks and liturgies at the massacre site of Myall Creek and other places of spiritual significance provided an uplifting sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Our eyes were opened to the greater presence of Jesus in our midst and our need to embrace and acknowledge this Aboriginal spirituality within the Catholic Church and not to lose this. Mary MacKillop, many religious brothers, sisters and priests in our diocese have brought Jesus into their midst and have forged lasting relationships that we must continue to nurture and understand if our Catholic Church is to move forward to embrace an Australian spirituality.

We have three experiences to share: 1. One member praises Novus Ordo (the New Order—from 1965) and relates her experience, as an Eastern Orthodox, in the Roman Catholic Church—how the Eucharist being not covered by the iconostasis (icon wall) helped her to connect with Christ. She related her experience of the overwhelming beauty of the Novus Ordo Mass as it is celebrated today in Westminster Cathedral. 2. One member saw an initiative to acknowledge the pain caused by the child sexual abuse scandals within the church. In [-] church there was a

plaque on the wall, possibly a diocesan initiative. It was an apology to the victims of child sexual abuse on a wall, inside the church. On looking up the vision and welcome statements on the parish website, there was an inclusiveness of all. It showed a degree of dialogue and understanding by the pastoral team of the constraints on people's lives and time, on the one hand, whilst still encouraging individuals to seek ways to develop their gifts and help build the effectiveness and vitality of the parish. 3. One member recounted an Easter Mass held on [-] beach at sunrise on Easter Sunday morning. The crowd of people of all ages worshiped together on the sand. The music on violin and flute was uplifting and a beautifully decorated driftwood cross adorned the front of the altar. We shared solemnly in the Eucharist. At the end of Mass, people were invited to stay for the baptism of four young catechumens who had been preparing to enter the Church. The priest took them into the surf to be baptised in a full immersion baptism. The Eucharist and the baptism were uplifting and great communal experience for all. This Easter Mass would not be forgotten.

Experienced the awareness and understanding of the Holy Spirit in a new, life-changing and fulfilling way through Baptism in the Holy Spirit and through being with like-minded Christians seeking to build God's Kingdom in our families and communities.

The Catholic Church has been part of my life all my life. My parents divorced when I was 10, My church and boarding school became my family. I felt protected and cared for. My church gave me the boundaries I needed. I accepted everything the Church told me and lived my life as a Catholic, often-daily Mass, the Rosary, Nuptial Mass, no birth control for us, 5 children reared as Catholics sent to Catholic schools. We financially supported the Church, as we were able. After Vatican II I studied and became a high school catechist for 14 years. Through this study, I learned to question. I became a marriage educator and counsellor. I have defended the Catholic Church, Her rules and regulations, all my life. Reading the cover-up of crimes of sexual abuse and the pure and utter arrogance practised by hierarchy all over the world hiding behind Canon Law absolutely sickens me. When I think of how little innocent children have been used and abused by criminals within the trusted ranks of our Church I feel physically ill and extraordinarily sad to the point of tears. To think this has been covered up and offending priests moved on to another parish to do the same thing is beyond my comprehension. I am shattered. Yes, I still have the Eucharist, which I love. I still have my personal relationship with God. I still have my love of Mary to whom I was dedicated by a nun cousin as a baby. I still remember many genuine priests with love and am grateful for their help and guidance over the years but my heart is aching when I think of the lies of omission from clergy hiding behind Canon Law that have been acted out in courtrooms all over the world. Now at the end of my life with incurable cancer I find that the Church I believed in and fought for does not exist. The Requiem Mass of Thanksgiving I was planning sits unfinished. The words of Jesus keep ringing in my ears—let the little children come to me. If someone harms one of these little ones it is better that, he have a millstone tied around his neck and be cast into the deepest ocean. Doesn't get more explicit than that! How could the hierarchy disregard those instructions? To what end the cover ups? I feel so lost.

I was raised a Catholic and my faith was always important to me, but it was ritual and practice not a living relationship with Jesus. When I was 26 with 3 children and a back problem that meant I could barely walk let alone look after my children, I cried out to God. He met me where I was in

my hurt, pain and uncertainty. I began going to a prayer group, which was charismatic in practice. I was introduced to praise and worship, the idea that I could personally know God and the recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in my life. I was Baptised in the Holy Spirit, began praying in tongues, experienced healing of the deep wounds of my childhood particularly rejection from my father who abandoned me before I was even born. For over 33 years I have walked in a closer relationship with Jesus, experienced the power and presence of the Holy Spirit on a daily basis. In the loss of my grandson, sister, mother and the breakup of my marriage, I have been held up, built up and strengthened to remain in faith and to find joy in all circumstances. The Word of God has become alive, "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path", the means to fight the daily battles, provides opportunities to pray for those near me, afar, friend or those who I find difficult to love. I have lived with paralysing fear and rejection and in my walk with Jesus, I have trained as a teacher and have now taught for twelve years. My faith leads me to pray for my students and my colleagues on a daily basis. I have raised my three children in faith and knowing the presence of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. As adults, two of those children have families and are raising them to know, love and serve God. My third child lives at home and continues to walk in faith. The glory for my life is not mine but God's, the saving Grace of Jesus Christ and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. The charismatic movement in the Catholic Church is a real outpouring of the Holy Spirit and has the capacity to transform the Church because it becomes not about us but about Jesus.

I am currently teaching my first religion class in secondary school. I find this a great experience as it makes me think about my faith and the meaning behind what we are focusing on. As a teacher I am reminded to develop my knowledge in my faith. I think this could be encouraged by all, as we all need a refresher in our lives of what we believe. Something also very important is every night I pray with my children, it is an important time that we stop reflect on our day and thank God for this life. We know God is there shining the way and as a mother I know it brings us closer together. I feel try blessed that God is there by our side.

I grew up and met wonderful holy men and women, besides my mum and dad. Many priests, my many parish families, children I taught and nuns influenced my faith. Most of all my personal relationship with Jesus. Father [-] was a wonderful influence on me by showing me that faith in Jesus was important and real courage is standing up for your beliefs.

I attended a Catholic school run by the wonderful Josephite sisters from 1956 to 1965. We lived our Catholic religion every day, guided by the sisters in school time and by our parents at home. I married in 1970 and have five children, who attended Sunday Mass with us every week. By mid 1980s most religious orders no longer operated our schools and as our children became adults, (except for our youngest child now 34) they stopped attending Sunday Mass. Every family I talk to tells the same story. If we are going to change this Mass evacuation from our Churches, it must start with a much more intense Catholic education to instil Catholic culture in our children. This could possibly mean employing and training of more dedicated teachers. A lot of our Catholic school teachers now might best be described as "left wing" wishy washy Catholics who rarely attend Mass themselves. As for the child sexual abuse by clergy, it sickens me to see "good priests" having to wear a civilian disguise so as not to be recognised as a Catholic priest in public. When will the Church listen to Pope Francis and purge the Church of these criminals once and for

all? We Catholic parishioners are also forced to wear this cloud of guilt whenever the word "Catholic" is uttered and we don't deserve it. The left wing media thrive on rubbishing Christian churches especially the Catholic Church. Perhaps it is time for the media wing of the Church to grow some muscles and stop turning the other cheek every time they are confronted by mainstream media.

I became a Catholic in 1969, at an amazing time of change within the Church. Vatican II was being put in place, we had Renewal of Faith. Catholics started reading the bible, committing their lives to Jesus in a personal way, taking on responsibility for their faith. It was just the most amazing time. Unfortunately now we have gone right back to the time before Vatican II, we are shrinking instead of growing. We have had all the upheaval of abuse by priests. We have lies still going on today, denials, and men in high places who think they know more than Jesus. Let's step out, let's acknowledge our weaknesses so that we can change. Good can come out of bad, we can be a better Church; we just need to stop denying the past. I love being Catholic, and I always will, but I love my faith enough to have hope in a new beginning, a new way and a new white cloak to be donned to show our love and humility to the world.

CONCLUSION

This report presented a summary of submissions that were received from your diocese in Phase One of the Plenary Council process called 'Listening and Dialogue'. The findings are in response to three main questions:

Question 1: What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

Question 2: What questions about the future of the Church in Australia would you like the Plenary Council to consider?

Question 3: Would you like to share a story about your experience of faith or of the Church in Australia that has shaped you?

Phase Two of the Plenary Council: *Listening and Discernment* is already underway and will continue until early 2020. The purpose of this stage is to listen deeply to what the Spirit is saying through the responses that have been submitted in Phase One and to understand and connect with the sense of faith that has been shared by the people of God across Australia.

We hope this report helps you in continuing to lead and encourage the engagement of many people in your diocese in this second phase as we discern together how God is calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is:

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

The National Centre for Pastoral Research sincerely thanks all the people from your diocese who participated in the Listening and Dialogue phase and those who continue to be engaged in the preparations towards Plenary Council 2020. We wish you and your diocese all the very best for the journey ahead.

APPENDIX 1: COMPLETE LIST OF GROUPS FROM YOUR DIOCESE

This is a complete list of group submissions from the Diocese of Armidale. Groups that did not provide a name were omitted from this table.

Name of group	Group size
St Nicholas Catholic Church Tamworth	2,300
St Philomena's School, Moree	35
Uralla & Walcha Parishes	30
St Patrick's Parish Council	20
St. Mary's Parish, Bingara	16
St Edward's Parish Family Group	15
St John's Parish, Barraba	15
Religious women in Rural Diocese	13
St. Josephs School	13
"St Michael's Manilla Parish group"	11
Armidale	11
Armidale Cathedral Plenary Council Group	10
Narrabri Parish	10
One of the Dialogue and Listening Groups from South Tamworth Parish	9
Sts Mary and Joseph Cathedral parishioners	9
Armidale menALIVE	8
Emmanuel spiritual Direction Community	8
The Thursday Group. Sacred Heart Parish Inverell.	8
St Edwards Conference, St Vincent De Paul	7
Uralla Parish Council	7
St Vincent De Paul St Peters Conference C/- St Nicholas Catholic Church East Tamworth	6
PC 2020 St. Edwards's Parish South Tamworth	Not stated
Parish of St Nicholas Catholic Church Tamworth	Not stated



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