



Final Report for Phase I: Listening and Dialogue

A Report to the Diocese of Bathurst

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Contents of this Report

| | |
|---|----|
| ◆ About this Report | 1 |
| ◆ Diocesan Summary of Submissions Snapshot: May 2018–March 2019 | 2 |
| ◆ Number of Submissions Received | 3 |
| ◆ Individual Submissions | 4 |
| ◆ Age of Respondents | 4 |
| ◆ Sex of Respondents | 5 |
| ◆ Countries of Birth | 6 |
| ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander | 7 |
| ◆ Religion of Respondents | 8 |
| ◆ Group Submissions | 9 |
| ◆ Age and Sex of Group Members | 10 |
| ◆ Responses to Question 1 | 11 |
| ◆ Themes discussed in response to Question 1 | 12 |
| ◆ Submissions made in response to Question 1 | 14 |
| ◆ Responses to Question 2 | 34 |
| ◆ Questions for Plenary Council | 35 |
| ◆ Responses to Question 3 | 38 |
| ◆ Stories of faith or Church shared in response to Question 3 | 39 |
| ◆ Conclusion | 48 |
| ◆ Appendix 1: Complete List of Groups From Your Diocese | 49 |

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

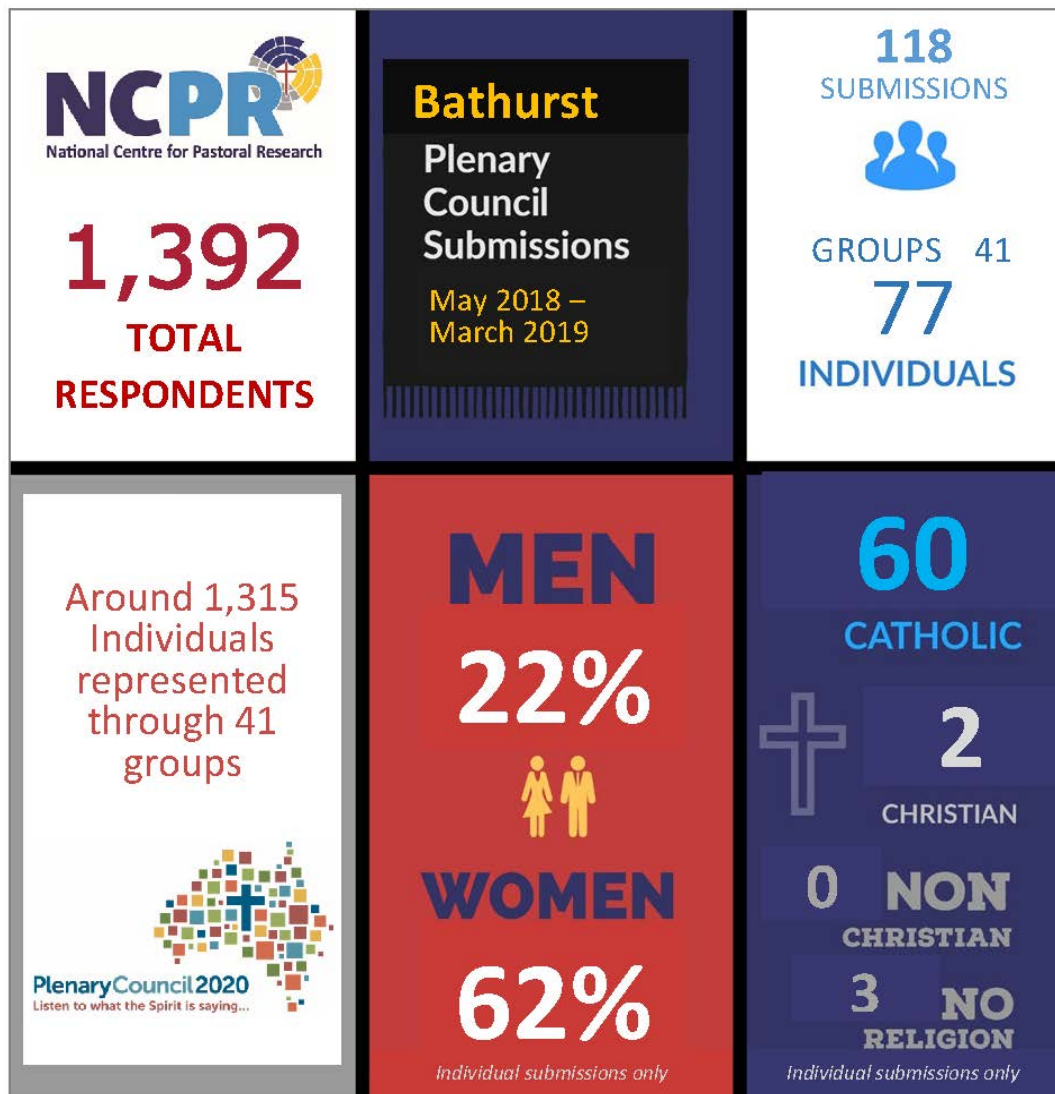
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Diocesan Submissions Summary Snapshot: May 2018—March 2019



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 - Bathurst

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 Bathurst, we received a total of 118 completed responses from May 2018 until 13 March 2019. Of these, 67 respondents had participated in a Listening and Dialogue Encounter, while another 17 were unsure if they had. About 33 respondents indicated that they had not participated in a Listening and Dialogue Encounter.

Of the 118 submissions, 41 submissions were from groups or organisations and 77 submissions were from individuals. There were 1,315 people represented through the 41 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 1,392.

| Table 1: Number of Submissions | |
|---|------------|
| Total number of submissions received | 118 |
| | |
| <i>Participated in Listening & Dialogue Encounter?</i> | |
| Yes | 67 |
| No | 33 |
| Not sure | 17 |
| Not stated | 1 |
| Total | 118 |
| | |
| Submissions received from groups or organisations | 41 |
| Submissions received from individuals | 77 |
| Total | 118 |

INDIVIDUAL SUBMISSIONS

At the close of the survey on 13 March 2019, a total of 77 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 Bathurst. Figure 1 is a graphical representation of the same table. About 49 per cent (38) were received from those aged 50 and over. The most number of submissions within this age range were received from the 65-69 years age group (9 responses).

At the close of submissions, there were nine individual submissions received from those aged under 25.

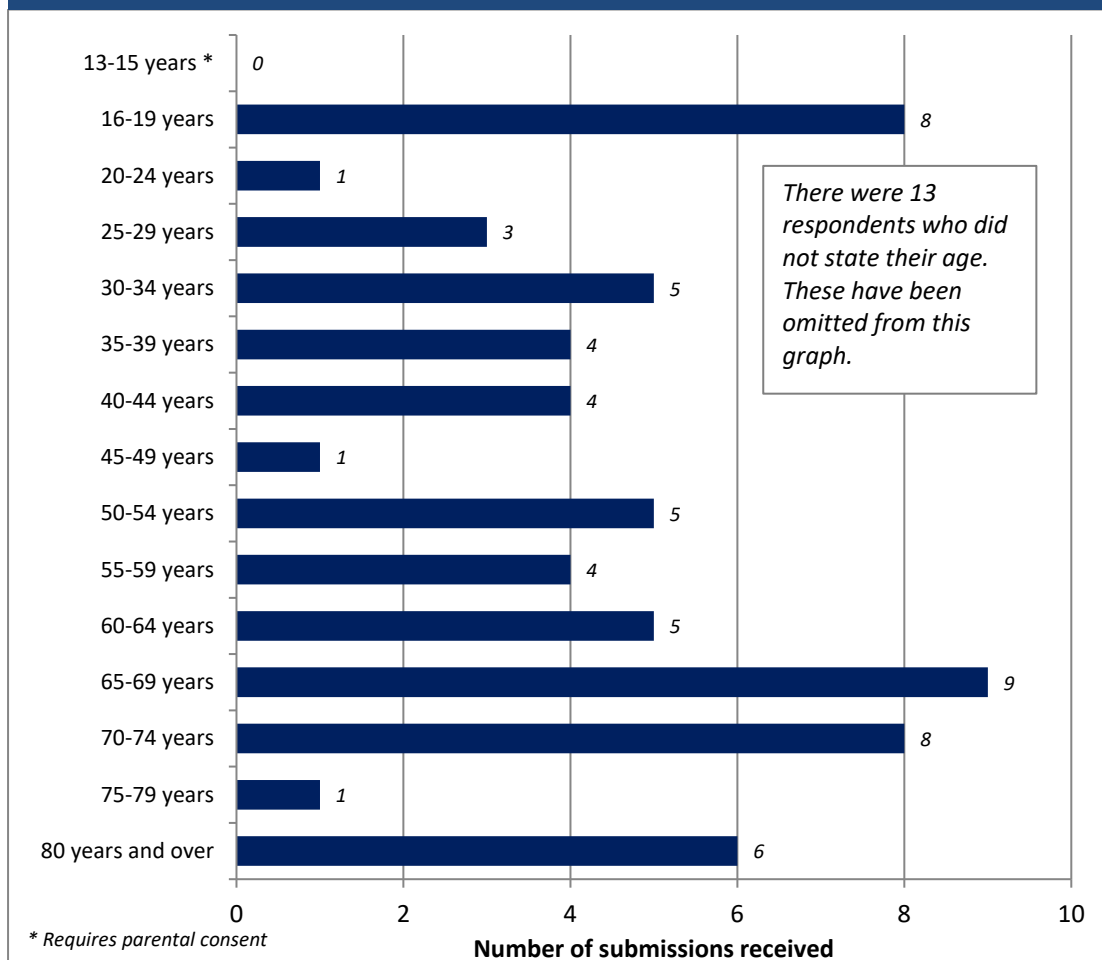
Participants aged 16-17 were encouraged to discuss the questionnaire with their parent or guardian. Many of these responses came from schools that sent in their responses through the online survey. As Table 2 shows, there were eight individual submissions made from the 16-19 years age group in your diocese.

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 | 8 |
| 20-24 years | 1 |
| 25-29 years | 3 |
| 30-34 years | 5 |
| 35-39 years | 4 |
| 40-44 years | 4 |
| 45-49 years | 1 |
| 50-54 years | 5 |
| 55-59 years | 4 |
| 60-64 years | 5 |
| 65-69 years | 9 |
| 70-74 years | 8 |
| 75-79 years | 1 |
| 80 years and over | 6 |
| Not stated | 13 |
| Total | 77 |

* Requires parental consent

Fig. 1: Age groups (individual responses only)

Sex of Respondents

More than half the number of all individual respondents from your diocese were female (62%), while a further 22 per cent were male. Table 3 shows that there were 17 men and 48 women who made submissions. One respondent preferred not to state their sex, while 11 respondents did not answer this question.

Table 3: Sex (individual responses only)

| | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| Female | 48 |
| Male | 17 |
| Prefer not to say | 1 |
| Not stated | 11 |
| Total | 77 |

Countries of Birth

Table 4a shows the country of birth of individual respondents from your diocese. As expected, a large number of respondents (75%) were born in Australia. Just under seven per cent came from other countries, while around 18 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 | 58 | 75.3 |
| Brazil | 1 | 1.3 |
| Ireland | 1 | 1.3 |
| Netherlands | 2 | 2.6 |
| United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | 1 | 1.3 |
| Not stated | 14 | 18.2 |
| Total | 77 | 100.0 |

| Table 4b: Country of birth - Summary (individual responses only) | | |
|---|-----------|--------------|
| | N | % |
| Australia | 58 | 75.3 |
| Other English speaking country | 2 | 2.6 |
| Non-English speaking country | 3 | 3.9 |
| Not stated | 14 | 18.2 |
| Total | 77 | 100.0 |

| Table 4c: Mother's country of birth (individual responses only) | | |
|--|-----------|--------------|
| | N | % |
| Australia | 57 | 74.0 |
| Other English speaking country | 2 | 2.6 |
| Non-English speaking country | 3 | 3.9 |
| Not stated | 15 | 19.5 |
| Total | 77 | 100.0 |

| Table 4d: Father's country of birth (individual responses only) | | |
|--|-----------|--------------|
| | N | % |
| Australia | 54 | 70.1 |
| Other English speaking country | 4 | 5.2 |
| Non-English speaking country | 4 | 5.2 |
| Not stated | 15 | 19.5 |
| Total | 77 | 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 were two individuals who identified themselves in this way, representing just under three per cent of all individual respondents.

| Table 5: Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (individual responses only) | |
|--|-----------|
| Yes | 2 |
| No | 61 |
| Not stated | 14 |
| Total | 77 |

Religion of Respondents

The religion question was answered by individual respondents only. Of the total 77 individual submissions that were received from your diocese, 60 respondents (78%) were Catholic. Two respondents were from other Christian denominations while there were none from non-Christian religions. A further 12 respondents did not state their religion and three respondents chose the 'no religion' response.

| Table 6: Religion (individual responses only) | | Person | Percent |
|--|--|---------------|----------------|
| Catholic | | 60 | 77.9 |
| Other Christian: | | | |
| Baptist | | 2 | 2.6 |
| Other Christian | | 0 | 0.0 |
| Non Christian: | | | |
| Other religion | | 0 | 0.0 |
| No religion | | 3 | 3.9 |
| Not stated | | 12 | 15.6 |
| Total | | 77 | 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 43 respondents indicated that they went to Mass regularly and were involved in other church activities. There were nine respondents who said they went to Mass and church activities sometimes, while one respondent considered themselves Catholic but was not involved. A further seven 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 | 30 | 12 | 1 | 43 |
| I am Catholic and go to Mass and church activities sometimes | 8 | 1 | 0 | 9 |
| I am Catholic, but I don't practise or get involved in anything | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| I consider myself Catholic but I am not sure what to think about the Catholic faith | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other | 2 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| Not stated | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Total | 44 | 15 | 1 | 60 |

GROUP SUBMISSIONS

At the close of the survey on 13 March, there were a total of 41 group submissions made from your diocese. Around 1,315 individuals were represented through these groups. However, there were three 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 31 group submissions provided a group name, 10 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 Bathurst Correctional Centre with around 600 members. There were also a number of other parish and school groups such as the Sacred Heart Church, Wallerawang with 100 participants and St Vincent's Church, Portland, NSW with 80 members. There were seven other groups with 20 members or more.

Table 8 : Group submissions from the diocese

| Name of group | Group size |
|--|------------|
| Bathurst Correctional Centre | 600 |
| Sacred Heart Church, Wallerawang, 2845 | 100 |
| St Vincents Church, Portland, NSW 2847 | 80 |
| ST. JOSEPHS PARISH, GILGANDRA | 77 |
| MacKillop College Bathurst | 55 |
| St Josephs Parish Gilgandra | 40 |
| Bathurst | 40 |
| Duboo | 40 |
| Mudgee | 32 |
| The Assumption School | 20 |
| St Ignatius Parish Oberon | 15 |
| Faith Group | 13 |
| Orange | 12 |
| Portland Parish Pastoral Council | 11 |
| Bathurst Diocesan Pastoral Council - Worshipping God in Prayer and Sacrament Working Group | 10 |
| St Marys Parish | 9 |
| Group of parishioners | 8 |
| St Brigids Parish | 8 |
| Group of parishioners | 7 |
| Group of parishioners | 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 70 years and over age group was the largest group represented with 229 members. This was followed by the group aged 50-69 years with 172 members. There was no age provided for around 23 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 | 21 |
| 20 - 29 years | 34 |
| 30 - 49 years | 113 |
| 50 - 69 years | 172 |
| 70 and over | 229 |
| Unknown | 23 |
| Total | 592 |

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

Of the total 648 group members whose sex was reported, 64 per cent (412) were female and 36 per cent (236) 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 | 412 |
| Male | 236 |
| Total | 648 |

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
- Leadership and Church Governance
- Sacraments
- 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 focus on Jesus Christ (p. 30)*
 - *Greater trust, faith and hope in God (p. 29)*
 - *Greater focus on the Word of God (p. 31)*
 - *Better faith formation (p. 38)*
 - *Remaining faithful to Church teaching (p. 32)*
 - *Care for neighbour (p. 36)*
 - *Keeping the commandments (p. 32)*
- Leadership and Church Governance (Chapter 7)
 - *Greater role for women (p. 83)*
 - *Ending clericalism (p. 80)*
 - *Greater involvement of the laity (p. 84)*
 - *New leadership and governance model (p. 91)*
 - *Greater leadership from bishops (p. 87)*
- Sacraments (Chapter 6)
 - *Greater emphasis on prayer and sacraments (p. 64)*
 - *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)*
- Social Justice and the Environment (Chapter 9)
 - *Greater inclusion of all (p. 108)*
 - *Fighting for human rights issues (p. 110)*
 - *Care for the environment (p. 112)*

- The Mass (Chapter 5)
 - *Mass to be appealing to youth and children (p. 54)*
 - *Different translation of the Mass (p. 56)*
 - *Emphasis on: New translation of the Mass (inclusive language; p. 56)*
 - *Better attention to all aspects of liturgy (p. 45)*
 - *Inclusion of the divorced and remarried (p. 46)*

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

- *Sharing the faith with others (p. 128)*
- *Stronger parish communities (p. 156)*
- *Formation of small Christian communities (p. 158)*
- *Special care of rural parishes (p. 162)*
- *Positive Church public relations (p. 168)*
- *Modernise Church teachings (p. 169)*
- *More transparency and accountability regarding clergy sexual abuse (p. 102)*

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 37 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.

I feel that God is asking the Church hierarchy to recognize and encourage the participation of women and laity in general in the sacramental and administrative functions of the Church. I feel to this date that the laity and especially women have not been allowed to contribute at significant levels in the Church. Many rural parishes have had the loss of resident parish priests and concurrently many women and lay people in general are gaining theological qualifications. However, Catholic decision-making authorities do not seem to have any desire to allow women and laity in general to have any real and valid participative roles in the Church. I feel that the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church to a situation where lay participation in the sacramental, teaching and preaching roles of the Church must be realized and affirmed. However, there seems to be resistance on behalf of bishops and priests to allow the full participation of the laity. Many rural parishes are only having access to the Eucharist once a fortnight or less. However when the laity offers to hold Communion Services in some places, this has been disallowed by the Priest in charge of the parish. This leads to the breakdown of parish communities, and the laity are left devoid of the Eucharist often in their more mature years. I feel that Catholics are primarily Eucharistic orientated. However, this call and desire of the Catholic laity is in some places frustrated and they are told to travel to other centres. The age of the lay people is increasing, and many are losing their driving licences or placed on restricted licences, and in places there is no care or concern for their deep desire to participate in the Eucharist through at least Communion services in the absence of an ordained Priest. I believe that this situation will never be changed if the Church structures are not reformatted to include that presence of many women in the decision-making processes. I feel too that the Church in Australia should be moving more rapidly to the ordination of lay women as well lay men to the permanent diaconate. Having had large

degrees of experience in many city and rural parishes, I feel that especially the rural parishes are in a place of enormous threat to their very existence. Laywomen are encouraged to do all the work to make the church ready for the celebration of the Eucharist, but their input and participation in such activities as Communion services and the teaching role of the Church in many places is not welcomed. There seem to be an unbridgeable gap between the mindsets of some priests and bishops and the laity and especially laywomen. Laywomen seem to be invisible and their needs, cares and concerns and their ability to participate in the Church at all possible levels has been ignored. The only possible way to remedy this situation is to offer leadership and participation roles to women at much more significant levels than presently exists.

I think God asks that we live lives that show through example that we are Catholic. We need to attend Mass regularly and be open to information that might help us deepen our faith. We need to be aware of others less well-off and do what we can to help. We need to volunteer to help others in need.

God surely wants our love, and our obedience, that we may draw close to Him, and draw as many souls into communions with Him. He wants us to remain faithful to His Holy Church, and to thoroughly cleanse the Church of any infidelity. Acts of love, penance and retribution.

I think God is asking us to do what He is and has always been asking us: to unite our wills with His. We have been humbled by the scandals in the Church in the last fifty years, but the truth does not cease to be true. To say that we are going to hear God by listening to each other is a most alarming statement. In the current state of things, I have no confidence in treating the laity as some sort of ecclesiastical democracy—bishops, priests, Holy Father, lead your flock! This is not the Church of mysticism; it is the Church of Apostolic Tradition. The world will hate us for holding to the truth and calling a sin for what it is, but we will lead no souls to heaven by doing otherwise. The world will hate us, but we shall gain heaven. Let us turn back to the inheritance of our tradition which we somehow lost hold of in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. Bring us back to the ten commandments, and the sacraments—especially reconciliation. Bring back the devotions, the Church approved private revelations. Bring back obedience, and humility, and all those virtues which have become a source of ridicule to the modern world. Bring back priests who are faithful to Church teachings, and their own vows, rather than opening the doors wider to make up the numbers. Repent, pray the rosary, and do penance. - Our Lady of Akita.

Catholics What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time? My response to this opportunity to provide feedback is:- For the Church to accept the Church's old pathway was one that led them away from their core purpose. I am pleased the Catholic Church/council is reviewing their practices and they are being consultative in the process. Due diligence and good governance is a necessity. To respond to the council's question "What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?" I believe to be true Christian in your compassion, respect and acceptance of all the diversity of life. The right to be without negative impediment on others; should be our way of open heartedness. priests to be well balanced and secure individuals who are holistic; mentally, spiritually, physically, emotionally and financially (not wealth generators but secured livelihood). Their right as a priest to live a balanced life whether male or female, married or not. To be a spiritual guide does not consider one's sexual orientation; sex by the way is natural and

healthy. It is when behaviour that is a negative imposition or detrimental to the wellbeing of individuals or a community is when it is wrong. The future of our churches as an asset to a meeting place. Opening them up to be venues especially in rural Australia for wellness activities like mindfulness and yoga. Any Catholic organisation should be guided and monitored to ensure compassion and care is taking place in their operations. Our parents' dedication to the Catholic Church for their lifetime; was no guarantee to ensure that they would receive care and compassion in their final years. Our family entrusted our parents into Catholic care system and we were failed upon. Today our family aches with the unresolved treatment of our parents during this care. Our parent deserved better as they were the best role models for good Christian Catholics who were loving, caring and compassionate people. To honour them I'm participating in this plenary council feedback. Thank you for the opportunity to input in the Catholic Church's future. In closing, the Church could do better by learning from other organisations and leaders who are practicing holistic spirituality.

To renew the relevance of a faith in God. In my work as a Catholic Secondary principal, I observed over time the increasing non-beliefs in a God by young adults. I have found that God has become irrelevant in people's lives. The majority of parents value a Catholic school for the values and discipline but not necessarily for the handing down/formation of faith.

We are aware that the Australian Church is in a unique situation. Having grown from a convict settlement we are used to struggle and deprivation. Geographical isolation has caused us to grow into a very independent people. The people of God in Australia have gathered for prayer from earliest times. The Third Rite of Reconciliation was a way of administering the Sacrament of Penance in Australia which spoke to the hearts of the Catholic people and each time this celebration of the sacrament was offered large crowds gathered with family groups attending together. Australians no longer seek advice or counsel from a priest in confession. There are many qualified professionals who offer this service. The role of the priest is to administer the sacraments and one way the people of God who greatly value the Sacrament of Penance could gain access to this sacrament is through the Third Rite of Reconciliation. We ask that the Third Rite of Reconciliation be reinstated in the Australian Church without limitation.

This response is from [-] NSW, a small but active church. As one priest is in charge of 2 parishes, Mass is celebrated on Saturday morning. What is God asking of us in Australia at this time?

- To pray to Our Lady, mother of our Lord Jesus Christ to protect our Church and give good example to the world so we may follow the Word of God.
- To allow small faith communities to continue even if it means having service in the absence of a priest as these communities provide a meeting place for and give support to those experiencing problems.
- To make the Church a welcoming and inclusive place. This needs to happen as a part of evangelisation.
- That young people need to be more engaged along with their parents.
- God is asking us to be faithful to his word and listen to his vicar, the pope.

- Prayer to heal the hurt and suffering of victims of sexual abuse. Name the perpetrators but also acknowledge the number of good priests and the work they do.
- To pray that God in his own time will bring people back to the Church.
- That the Church acknowledge that it is patriarchal, hierarchical and bound by clericalism. These attributes will have to be dealt with if the Church is to regain the trust and respect of its followers.
- Why does there appear to be a widening gap between the secular and the religious?
- There appears to be a high level of spiritual poverty, which the Church needs to acknowledge and pray about. Many people say they believe in God but they don't think they have to do anything about it.
- Many of the issues confronting our Church are more societal issues that need to be addressed by society and the Church can assist by standing firm in its beliefs and faith. This needs to be authentic and inclusive because that's what Jesus is.

1. We believe that the Sacrament of Marriage in Australia should be separated from civil marriage. The couple, who in Church teaching give the sacrament to each other would have the civil part of their marriage conducted in the government agency and then seek sacramental marriage in the Church. We also propose that the Church encourages lay people to become Marriage Celebrants so they can be the official Church witness of the Sacrament of Marriage if a Nuptial Mass is not requested.

As we observe overburdened priests in our parishes, we are looking for ways of supporting and relieving them of time consuming and arduous tasks which could be carried out and well done by lay persons. The business and financial administration of parishes in Australia is one such area of concern. Priests are expected to run the business side of the parish when in some cases they have little training, interest or expertise in these matters and in many cases find this burdensome and time consuming. We believe that it is important to employ lay people for this purpose. We acknowledge it can be very difficult to find the right person for this job with a good balance between the professional qualifications required and the faith and pastoral commitment to the Catholic Community. However, we propose that the business administration of parishes be gradually entrusted to suitably qualified and remunerated lay persons who have a deep desire to serve the people of God in Australia. Such an initiative would free the priests for those specific priestly duties which form the role of the Catholic priest in Australia.

God is asking us all to return to Him and give Him priority in our lives. To love Him with all of our hearts, souls, and minds. To worship and thank Him as Jesus taught us. To honour our traditions. To teach all Catholics the deeper truths of our faith. To be truthful, honest and transparent to all, regardless of how 'unpopular' it may be in today's world. To follow God's way, NOT the way of man or the world. To acknowledge and understand the Catholic Church is a universal dictatorship, with God at its head, and not a democracy where the people can vote or have influence over what it believes. We are all fallen children of God, and we all need to acknowledge our fallen-ness, repent, and change our ways to those of God. To return public respect and honour to our religion, along with the people chosen to lead us. To save souls.

| |
|---|
| <p>To be a more welcoming Church, inclusive of all peoples regardless of their backgrounds. To reach out to others, grow, be accepting and have the ability to acknowledge and understand differences. Be more Christlike in our everyday lives. To be a pastoral and proactive Church with ecumenical outreach.</p> |
| <p>We are concerned about how our faith is passed on to our children in our families and in our schools. The theology of the Catholic catechism does not reflect recent learnings about evolution, cosmology and science. A simple publication needs to be available on line and in book form, to pass on the fundamental beliefs of our faith and to assist in RCIA programs and Religious Education. Such a publication would need to be constantly reviewed in this changing world and could be given to parents when their children are baptised.</p> |
| <p>We feel God is asking us to be actively involved in the Church. To reach out to others, especially the marginalized and the poor. To be truly egalitarian, not hierarchical!</p> |
| <p>We strongly believe that married priests should be part of our Catholic community. Many men have left the priesthood or the seminary but still have yearning to serve the people of God. They should be welcomed into the ranks of priesthood and given the opportunity to exercise their ministry. These priests could be ordained for the local community and would allow Eucharist to be available in small rural areas where churches are closing and parishioners are left without Eucharist in their local area. Ordination would be for a set term and such priests could carry on their ordinary employment while serving the community when required. We also favour the ordination of women deacons in the short term and women priests in the long term. Many women accompany people in sickness and sorrow and are asked to celebrate funerals. Not to allow people choice in this matter is a deprivation. We would like to see more opportunity to experience the 'home' church where local families could gather for liturgy and prayer and an ordained person would be part of the local community and preside at Eucharist. This may lead the young to a deeper appreciation of Eucharist. They would be intimately involved and grow in faith by the environment created by such experiences. We believe that children learn from the faith of people around them. To nurture a relationship with Jesus is paramount for the Christian life.</p> |
| <p>I think God is asking us to work together to create a Church community that is inclusive and relevant to the people of today.</p> |
| <p>God is asking us too honestly and without reservation to speak our truth so the leaders in our Church may know what's in our hearts.</p> |
| <p>1. That Australians become more aware that all people are made in the image and likeness of God This call from God has many dimensions the most important of which seem to us to be. Placing renewed emphasis on the immanence of God in each individual and encourage all to recognise and develop a personal relationship with God. Allowing women to participate fully in Australian society but particularly in the Catholic Church where restrictions on their role has been both unjust and has deprived the Church of their wisdom. This contrasts starkly with Wisdom often portrayed as the God's feminine dimension. Condemning all forms of discrimination whether by gender, race, sexual orientation or physical and mental disability. Proclaiming that refugees have a right to ask for asylum and should be treated justly and humanely. Indefinite off shore detention is a gross violation of human rights. Recognising that increasing inequality in income and wealth in</p> |

Australia is not only unjust but has significant social and economic costs. Recognising that within the Catholic Church all have rights and responsibilities for the vitality of their parishes which is discouraged by the Church's present hierarchical structure. Becoming modern day missionaries, not by proclaiming the doctrine of the Church, but by living and proclaiming the Truth and Love of God as revealed by Jesus.

2. That Australia becomes more aware of their responsibilities to take care of all God's creation. This call from God derives from his immanence in all creation and from a recognition that future generations are also our neighbours. It also has several dimensions the most important of which seem to us to be: Controlling our emission of greenhouse gases to ameliorate climate change induced by mankind. Conserving plant and animal biodiversity. Limiting the degradation of soil and water resources.

3. Focusing particularly on the institutional Church, we believe that God is expecting the Church to continue with a heartfelt and compassionate response to the victims of sexual abuse and the many Australians scandalized by the how the Church has handled this question so as to make more likely that the Plenary Council will be an influence for good in the lives of Catholics and all Australians.

To be a compassionate and welcoming people, giving a home to those in need and caring for all people in a humane, positive and empowering way.

1. God is not asking the following as it is already allowed in scripture but as a member of the Church I would like the Church to allow married priests and to make celibacy optional for the current priesthood. There is no prohibition in scripture and I feel like many others that this is needed both as a response to the Royal Commission and to ensure the continuation of the priesthood in Australia. 2. God is a forgiving and merciful God and as such, the denial of full participation in the Eucharist to divorced and remarried persons is unloving. There are very few families that are untouched by divorce and these people are alienated from the life of the Church. Jesus died so that all may receive him and come as they are. Paedophile priests have been protected by the Church and allowed to perform the Eucharist despite their grievous continual sins yet divorced people who remarried are perpetually denied access to the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We think the answer to the question, can be summed up in this scriptural quote (Micah 6:8) ... and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (NRSV translation)? The Worshipping God in Prayer and Sacrament Working Group of the [-] Diocese Pastoral Council met and reflected on the Plenary question. This quote from Micah summed up for us the answer to the quest. From the quote, all other works of the Church can be the result. Justice, Love, Kindness and Humility are like the pillars of our faith and from these we are called to serve the Lord in a variety of ways. The Group suggested the ways listed below as expressions of this scripture quote:

- Lead the Church into a hope-filled future and is strong and vibrant for all.
- Post sacramental catechesis that is life-long
- Attract people to participate in the Church by the good works of others

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore the order of sacraments to their theological basis i.e. Baptism - Confirmation – Eucharist • Provide more support for Catholic schools and teacher • Evangelise, spread the Gospel • Re-assess the role of parish priests as legislated in the Code of Canon Law to enable flexibility with administration and governance—collaborative ministry model • Provide ‘good’ liturgy all the time e.g. provide for paid music ministry co-ordinators • Encourage people to act courageously in living out their vocation • Investigate ways the Church can earn back the respect of the community to renew trust • Investigate different learning strategies for younger people to understand their faith • Investigate how women can be involved in ordained ministry e.g. deacons, priests and bishops • Establish norms to allow marriage to be celebrated outside churches • WE, the Church, need to be the ‘face of God’ in our communities, to name Christ as our motivation to do good works • The faithful need to know the basics of our faith, the values etc. |
| <p>I think the laity is called to participate in plans for the future of our Church. We have to avoid so called "clericalism".</p> |
| <p>I think God is asking us in Australia to have open hearts and minds, to be inclusive and to respond to the issues we here. Welcoming refugees, creating life-giving meaningful work for all who can work, addressing issues of climate change and living more sustainably on this land. If we can learn how to experience God in all of life, then all of life will be known and treated as sacred and our responsibilities will hopefully flow out from this sense of sacredness.</p> |
| <p>This is a difficult question to answer as the teaching of the Church is outdated.</p> |
| <p>I believe the message of the priests is not reflective of 'Gods' teachings. From my understanding God wants us to go to church, that is all.</p> |
| <p>I think biblical teachings are outdated so who knows.</p> |
| <p>I don't understand what he is asking. This is a difficult question for me to answer because I don't have the strongest faith in it. There may or may not be a superior being however I have seen no signs of it before. I believe in miracles but I believe it happens by chance. Not by a greater force above. I also believe that if there was a 'superior' being that they would ask nothing more than to be kind to one another and keep our earth clean.</p> |
| <p>God is asking us to believe in these unrealistic and unethical beliefs that not many people understand and it is seen by the Catholic Church that what God is asking must be followed although what he is asking is outdated as I attend a Catholic School but have no belief in Catholicism/Christianity or any other religion for that matter it feels as though whilst attending church the beliefs of that Jesus and God are forced down the people's throats with no regard of what they want to believe or how they want to believe it. Priests tell us and ask us to do these things the way "God wants them to be done" but how on earth do priests and bishops know what</p> |

God wants no one would have any clue what God would want as there is no proven way that they can communicate with him, which leads me to believe that priests allow for this biased determinants of what they believe "God wants". "God wants" us to believe in all these different things but how do we know that this just isn't the modern Churches' idea of what they believe God would have wanted which in my opinion no one can answer that question. If you can prove to me that God can actually be communicated with to ask him how he wants "his" world, then I believe the world should be shown and given an insight into how this communication process apparently works. I will never be someone who goes to church or believes in any of these Christian or any religious beliefs. The Church has all these very strict rules on how their priests must behave and all the conditions on how they must act, they are not allowed to married and must remain celibate, but how are these guidelines stuck to when there are multiple cases of child sexual abuse by priests on young boys yet the Church hierarchy has not acknowledged or apologised for any of these acts and they don't seem to be intending to. Either they have basically thrown a blanket over the whole situation or have tried to cover it and move on. Yet this is not something you can move on. Something must be done about this. Yet the Church is so focused on its image and how good they look over other churches and religious sects that they don't even want to discuss the topic of their wrong doings. In conclusion, I believe that no one knows what God wants if there even is one because in my opinion there is no greater being that oversees all of mankind and looks after all of us. We all look after ourselves and if we don't, we don't survive. It's as simple as that.

I think God wants us to believe in Him, believe in good, and wants us to do good things in the world. I think it's difficult to understand what he is asking of us when the Bible and the doctrine might be considered as 'outdated'. I don't believe the Church keeps up with the times or is modern in their thoughts and preaching. I wonder how we can determine an interpretation of God and his teachings. How do we know that is his message? Who decides this? I think we have priests, bishops and the pope making decisions that might not reflect decisions that God would make.

We are aware that the bishops have the final say at the Plenary Council. This does not sit well with our group. We believe the PC needs to be inclusive of all voices who make up the Church in Australia. It is true that we have had the opportunity to put in submissions but we have no way of knowing what other people are saying or whether our voices will be heard. The bishops on the whole, appear fearful of hearing and speaking out about what the people really think and lack understanding of the day to day faith challenges facing families. A large number of people don't want to enter into PC discussions because valiant efforts in the past have gone nowhere and there is a feeling of 'what's the use?' One example of the Church not understanding where people 'are at' is the Rite of Baptism. The language used is far removed from the people's lives. If the ceremony is being conducted by a priest from a different culture or a priest who cannot adapt to the situation of the families, much of this rich opportunity to enhance the faith journey of those present is lost. Similarly, the Rite of the Anointing of the Sick needs revision to enable the sick or frail person to enter into the words being prayed. Communication at all levels in the Church is essential. At parish and diocesan levels it is important to know who is doing what and how one can contribute at a level with which they feel comfortable. Many people give of time and energy

on a large scale but this may not be known generally. A continuing concern is how we pass on the faith to our young people and nurture our own spirituality. The celebration of Eucharist needs to be meaningful for the group present. Readings, prayers and homilies do not need to be long, but well prepared and relevant. To grow in our relationship with God in the company of Jesus and trusting in the Holy Spirit is what we yearn for.

We are calling for transparency in the Church. The Anglican Church conducts synods and full reports of discussion etc. can be accessed on line. What can we learn from our Anglican brothers and sisters? The Pope is calling us to be a synodal Church. How can we respond to this call and allow all voices to be included in the conversations? Open consultation, discussion and decision making will take us into a future where people are engaged with their Bishops and priests in facing the complex situations in which we find ourselves today. No one group of people has the answers but together with the conscious guidance of the Holy Spirit we can take a renewed Church forward and include our young people in the journey. Many clergy have not upgraded their theology from seminary days and on the other hand, many lay people are well educated theologically. Matters such as contraception and divorced and remarried Catholics need the informed voice of married people to guide the Church in responding to these situations. Many people carry guilt either consciously or unconsciously about their situations and remain away from the Church because they feel uncomfortable. There is very little encouragement to develop a healthy conscience where a person can act with integrity even though they may be contravening a particular law of the Church. Children of such families naturally 'pick up' the reluctance of their parent/parents to go to Mass and when it comes to First Communion must wonder why parents don't receive such a treasured sacrament. On the whole the Church appears diffident to appear in the secular media. There is much that is positive for the Church to allow to be publicised. We will receive unwanted publicity without our seeking it but that is no reason to deny the wonderful good done by the Church in Australia and throughout the world. To present a positive image in a humble way takes time, study and expertise. It may even be necessary to employ people to carry out this function.

The Eucharist is central to our faith life: encourage people to use their gifts and talents and become more involved; have things happening to invite people to. Need to be more welcoming, accepting and valuing of diversity, so people feel they belong, are valued and take ownership of their involvement in Church. This would create greater knowledge and understanding of liturgy and engender greater reverence. Being fearful of offending God is good. We have become fearful of discussing faith with people so as not to offend them but are no longer fearful of offending God. As the youth are the future of our Church they especially need to be made feel welcomed, valued and belonging. They need to be invited to be involved in various aspects of the Mass and other Church activities. They will remember and embrace something they have been involved in. Actions speak louder than words. They have many talents and gifts and they should be used. 'If you don't use it you lose it' is pertinent. Churches need to be open for greater opportunity for visitation and adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, and we need to return to the practice of Benediction, Holy Hours and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Missions are good to build, nurture and strengthen our faith and would be a focal point for invitation. Sin is sin. Faith has been weakened through lack of discipline, the watering down of values and the loss of mystique

and fervour. We need to return to the truths of the Bible and have fidelity to the Gospel message. To cultivate a constant prayer life and strengthen faith we need to draw nourishment from Scripture and other religious material, discuss experiences, tell stories and especially develop 'spirituality around the kitchen table' to engender discussion about faith within families and small groups. Encourage home prayer groups to build relationship and make connection, nurture and strengthen faith. A good starting point for those not attending church. We need a simple, concise and direct catechism similar to the old 'Penny Catechism'. Schools and parishes should cross over not run parallel. Schools could invite families to volunteer for activities at Mass. School staff should attend Mass regularly to have greater knowledge and understanding of liturgy for the preparation of school liturgies. There should be more participation of the laity. Supporting the preparation and follow up of the sacramental programme as it is a parish celebration and an opportunity for invitation and evangelisation of the whole family to understand it is the beginning of a life journey not just a 'one off' event. Sacramental celebrations are a parish celebration and should be supported by parishioners. Prayer sponsors should acknowledge and support their benefactors. Parish priests be shepherds not administrators. If not burdened with administration they could concentrate on pastoral duties. Married priests optional would enable better understanding of family difficulties.

We believe we are called to a more inclusive and faith nurturing celebration of Eucharist and the sacraments. To achieve this we must look seriously at 1) the lectionary and the choice of daily and Sunday readings, 2) the New Missal which does not promote ease of prayerful attention either for the priest or the gathered community and 3) the Rite of Baptism which uses language far removed from the experience of ordinary people. Inclusive translations are essential in our modern world. The language used to greet people, to share the Word of God and to give voice to what is taking place is fundamental to the creation of an environment in which people can be open to the work of the Spirit among them. Readings which tell of God's anger and punishment metered out from above can be taken literally and when heard over and over again seem to stay with people more readily than the message of God's unimaginable love for us and God's abiding presence within each person. We understand that the pope has asked local Bishops' Conferences to consider what is best for the people of God in their area regarding these matters. We strongly urge our bishops to take up this challenge, to engage lay people in the work of revision and to restore confidence that the institutional Church can act in the faith interests of Australian Catholics.

Develop sense of empowerment in laity so that we, particularly as women, can claim our significant baptismal rights in remodelling a church that reflects Jesus values rather than Roman, juridical practices. Have a good look at canon law. Church governance is out of step with justice values outlined in Vatican 2, especially in calling for participation of women and collegiality of authority... e.g. election of bishops by male and female inclusion and e.g. diocesan pastoral councils. Pastoral care needs to include care of priests themselves through encouragement of married clergy both male and female, and pastors need scope to sensitively care for people outside mainstream including gay and people in irregular relationships. Hierarchy to show humility rather than symbols of power n.b. cardinals in Rome in fancy robes! Please allow significant voted to laity in this council so that we may not continue with business as usual in Church governance.

Adults and children need to be catechized in the faith and especially in the sacraments and the supernatural faith. To bring back reverence in the church and to the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. To help people become saints and turn away from sin. To teach what sin is!!! In the old and new testament the first commandment is about loving God and THEN your neighbour, but we are not doing that, but bowing down to whims of the people. The leaders of the church should be vigilant about defending moral laws instead of being silent. E.G. abortion, homosexual marriage. Practices of Adoration and Devotionals rekindled so that people spend time with their God. Good Catholic bible resources and good Catholic catechist resources. Bring back catechist learning in Catholic schools. Only practicing Catholics to teach in Catholic schools.

God is asking us to get back to basics and nurture our faith in our homes and in the community like they did in the early Church (Acts 2:42) 'They were faithful to the teaching of the apostles, the common life of sharing, the breaking of bread and the prayers'. First comes the teaching, then the Christian fellowship, then the breaking of bread; that is the Eucharist, and finally, the common prayers of thanksgiving. That is, we get the teaching through the Word of God, nurturing our own faith, then go out into the community and build relationships through family groups, home prayer groups, community organisations, work places etc. ... Encourage people to use their gifts and talents. No one has all the gifts, the Holy Spirit gives different gifts to different people but as a community we are given all the gifts. This needs to be emphasised more in our churches. We have become too complacent, expecting the priests and sisters to 'do it all'. This way of thinking has to change. The religious need to let go the reigns and we, the laity, need to take ownership of the gifts and talents the Holy Spirit has given us and put them into practice allowing the Spirit to flow. The laity's need to support and encourage families through their children's preparation for the sacraments and beyond, helping them to understand that these celebrations are the beginning of a life long journey, not just a 'one off' experience. Build a relationship with these families and encourage them to open their Bibles and talk about their faith with their children, nurturing their own and their children's faith. Invite them to and involve them in various church activities including Mass, allowing them to belong and take ownership of their involvement in Church life. If these families are not involved in church by the time their children have reached the Sacrament of Confirmation then we have not done our job. Home prayer groups are to be encouraged. This is a good place to invite the unchurched, to open the Word, build relationships, share stories, particularly of faith experiences, and encourage and support people on their life journey.

As the shortage of priests becomes a greater problem and more parishes are losing their resident priest, in parishes where Mass centres only receive Mass periodically, the bishop should encourage and allow Communion services to be held in the Mass centres when there is no Mass being celebrated, so people aren't forced to travel long distances to the parish church.

God is asking us to repent and return to the core values and teachings of His Holy Word. We need to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and be forgiving and accepting of all races, genders, beliefs and backgrounds. Divisions and segregations should be removed. We need to work together as united Christians toward peace and harmony. God does not focus on rituals and practises but on relationships, especially with him. God would want the Catholic Church to be open and accepting of all other Christians, not treat them differently. All should be welcome to the table. God would want for priests and all religious the privilege to marry. His work can be

done through all. Christ showed acceptance and forgiveness to all. Divorced individuals should be allowed to remarry in the Church. God would want us to reach out to the youth in a way that is relevant and appropriate to them. Many Australians are not aware of the dangers that come with the new age movement and that Satan is behind it all. Churches should have more lectures outside of the Mass about the truth and how Christian spirituality works. God would want us to practise what we preach. God would want us to remove "the market from the temple" (the business and money making) in the name of faith. The Vatican needs to reveal the truth and stop keeping secrets. God would want us to return to the true meaning of the Ten Commandments. We need to translate the lessons from the bible in a way young people would understand. The bible is far too often misunderstood and feared, turning many away. Sadly the teachings of the bible (from some of the religious) have traumatised many individuals putting fear into their hearts and minds. Instead of seeing God as a loving and forgiving God, they see a punishing and cruel God, and hell being the place they will go because of their sins. Lay people and women should have more involvement in the Church/Mass. Many are disappointed at the sight of wealth at the Vatican whilst there is so much poverty around the world. God would want us to work united in His name, not by divisions or labels. God would want the clergy to live by example and not abuse their position and power. God wants us to reach out to the young because they are the future.

Threats to attending Church—There seems to be fewer people coming to Mass. One possibility is the rise of evangelism in the form of small groups meeting for bible study and discussion outside Mass. For some groups this is replacing Mass as a social and spiritual gathering. With the rise of social media, Mass as a social adhesive has been replaced by personal broadcasting and busy work, sporting and social schedule. When parents do not attend Mass, the children are unlikely to create a culture of attending Mass outside of school. Community focus has shifted from the Church community (spiritual wealth) to personal wealth creation. Church as a community Hub—The Church once provided a support system for schools, now the schools provide a support system for the Church. Provides a private education at a reasonable price. Allows students to investigate faith through studies of religion. Baptism remains important as a rite of passage to many groups and many families retain their connection to the Church through baptism of children. Groups like "Little Lambs" playgroup retain families and provide support in the early years of childhood and parenting. Why is going to Mass important? In less affluent countries retention of Mass seems to be crucial. The Church remains an important source of ritual to mark life transitions: baptism, marriage, funerals. It reminds us of the meaning of a good life. These rituals are a time of reflection at the end of life. The Church needs to bring people back to understanding the Mass as 'the word of the Lord, to the presence of the Lord' rather than a ritual of Easter and Christmas, births, deaths and marriages. People feel most connected to the Church when they have a strong connection to individual priests during Mass. With a strong priest-parishioner connection, you can be drawn out of your own thoughts. Engage in the Mass ritual to create presence in each word and therefore engagement with the world after Mass. Sermons should be short, thought provoking, answer questions and then move on. Big Picture, Local Connections—The numbers in Mass at the church are both a blessing and a distraction for younger parishioners. Children get lost in the church and the ritual of a Mass does not allow children to exercise their curiosity through interjection. By the end of a full Mass they have forgotten their questions and shut down their curiosity. Class Masses and religion classes allow

children the opportunity to think, ask questions and make connections between the Mass and their lives through discussion and questioning. We need to inspire children to engage in Mass and its message for a good life.

In the words of Bishop Vincent Long, "we need to develop a new and relevant practice of faith for future generations." We need to have a more synodal Church which is more inclusive. Laity, both female and male, needs to be included in full and equal participation in the Church. A three-way conversation is needed between hierarchy, priests and laity. The paradigm of "fortress church" needs breaking from exclusivity and elitism. The Church needs to be transparent, accountable, non-clericalist, properly inclusive and truly humble. We need to consider more the teachings of Jesus and review so many present man decreed rules that have little relevance to church goers of the 21st century.

We strongly believe that God is asking the Catholic Church in Australia to act courageously and include men and women as equals at all levels of Church life especially in its governance and decision making. Governance Structures, systems, culture and practices in the Church must change and immediately. We feel that much of the sex abuse crisis could have been avoided and differently handled if women were integral to the way the Church is run. The image of 'men only' sitting at the Vatican to discuss the sex abuse crisis, and similar images replicated throughout Australia when we see men gathered to deliberate on the life of the Church, is appalling to faithful Catholics, both men and women. Women overwhelmingly are in the majority at church gatherings, including daily and Sunday Mass. They know that all is not right with the Church and feel powerless to act because they continue to be excluded from making their contribution to which baptism entitles them. The late Daniel O'Leary in his final article for 'The Tablet' lamented the fact of compulsory celibacy for priesthood. Generous aspirants to priesthood must be given choice in this matter. An urgent step to introduce change in the clerical culture requires a re-look at seminary education, the screening of candidates, the discernment of call to priesthood and a natural 'living' setting where seminarians can pursue their studies whilst making life giving decisions for themselves and the people of God they wish to serve. The Plenary Council offers a unique opportunity for the Church in Australia. Archbishop Mark Coleridge keeps saying in the media that structures etc. must change. Let the Catholic people be given hope that we might become a listening, inclusive, humble and holy Church that puts the Gospel before all else.

The future of the Church is with younger people, how they perceive God wants us to act in our society especially in relation to others in the community and to think of others first.

To emphasise the importance of Jesus' message of love in a simple form of understanding the real meaning. The hymn 'Jesus, Son of Justice' is a wonderful example of what He meant us to do. Sadly, many young people and adults are turning away from His teachings because they have lost trust in their Catholic faith. They seek consolation from other sources such as Buddhism, where it speaks of ways to reach happiness or other areas where it may not be a wise decision and could be damage to their lives. There is a booklet published by the Dalai Lama called the Essence of Happiness. Some of the wisdom is close to the words Jesus teaches. I feel it may be helpful for the Catholics' faith to have a booklet published to bring the wisdom of Jesus to those who in their seeking may read His words of simple explanations of the need for us to follow his reasons for the importance of loving others as He loves us, and to love one another as we love ourselves. This is

2019 and a year of many past hurts that have shaken the Church's foundation and we all are confused. Maybe God is asking for simplicity, the kind that Pope Francis has shown since becoming pope. We need to start to look into ourselves and rid ourselves of things that are not Christ-like and take on the shield of love.

Jesus, Son of Justice,
arise within our hearts.
Shine into our darkness and
drive away our nights.
Melt our cold and stony fears,
enflesh our hearts with love.
Love will hear our people's cry.
And love will bring them home.

I believe this is God's message to us.

God is asking us to revitalise the Church in Australia to make it relevant to today's society.

- * Healing for planet Earth - the earth is our "primary and most perfect revelation of God" (Thomas Aquinas) and we are letting it become "more and more like a pile of filth" (Pope Francis).
- * We must deconstruct the patriarchal structures that hide criminal activity in our Church.
- * Bring in leadership of visionary, educated, collaborative women at all levels
- * Find leaders from our own pews, not from overseas.
- * Allow more openness and receptivity to creativity and diversity at all levels of the Church in Australia.

God is eternal and has been calling us into relationship since before we were born. God is asking of us the same thing throughout all eternity and that is to live in communion, not just with God and each other but with all of creation. We are in a time of renewal, like the rise and fall of civilisations before us, if we don't actively engage in renewal, it has a way of happening to us anyway. St Benedict called his community to listen with the ear of the heart (RB Prologue), an active intentional listening which calls each to strip away ego and all that is not of God to walk God's path for us. The Catholic Church in Australia is called to nothing less than this challenging task, drawing from all our mistakes and understanding to move toward God together, as a visual sign of the body of Christ in our world. For this to take place, we have to "get real". Get out from behind the institution and become the communion of saints active in our world, for our time, today!

God is asking us to work in unity with Indigenous Australians, mending/healing the past hurts. We need to go back to true spirituality and the true relationship with God. God wants us to work

together with people of all multicultural backgrounds, to be open and accepting and step out of our comfort zones and old segregated practises. God wants us to live his way in a new contemporary way. The Masses and gospel messages need to relate and connect to today's society. Young people need to understand the Word of God in a way that is relevant for them and their future.

We are being asked to remember that by our Baptism, we are "clothed in Christ" and so should ALL be more Christ-like in all our daily activities (and this includes the hierarchy) and more open and encouraging of all those who are on the edges of our society who have been excluded for SO LONG... . We are also "a priestly people" and so should be more involved in leadership in our parishes, diocese and at national levels in the Catholic Church. The laity should be more involved in various ministries, e.g. Celebration of the Word with Holy Communion, funerals, etc., especially in rural areas instead of relying on priests from overseas who have challenges in assimilating to these areas. As families are the "domestic Church", resources are needed to encourage families to be more connected to local parishes and feel welcome, included and safe. We are being asked to reflect on our history, the treasures of Vatican II, and how society has developed to 2019. We must read the signs of the time and respond to the needs and possibilities for all people. We also have a responsibility for the care of the land, environment and the sustainability for future generations. Resources are needed to support us in this responsibility.

A common sense revision of 2011 ritual to make prayers etc. comprehensible and meaningful for us all. Fully inclusive language in all liturgical texts. Our bishops must lead the charge in fighting clericalism rather than be dragged along. Acceptance of married men for ordination. Inclusion of competent women at all levels of decision making including National Bishops Conference. Laity given a say in choosing new bishops. Competent national media spokesperson.

To halt and consider the future. I am an elderly parishioner of our parish. My Catholic faith has helped me over many challenges down the years, & I will cling to it—till "God calls me home". Catholics in Australia at the moment are very distressed over recent happenings—but we must remain calm and place our hands in God's—and He will guide us. The pope is the head of the Catholic Church but he resides in Rome, surrounded by many traditions, and a long way from Australia. Major changes must be made, and soon. Australia has some very devout and clever clergy. They must unite and discuss the future of the Catholic Church and seek permission from the pope to make changes BY THEM, here in Australia such as priests should be allowed to marry (if they want). Readings from the missal should be made with more understanding to young and old. School leavers have to be approached, and every effort must be made to keep them nearer the Church and involved in ways that interest them, and also increase their trust in their clergy. The time is NOW.

Live the gospel authentically—individuals, and organisations. To withdraw from arrangements with government which can invite pressure to compromise—e.g. celebrating marriages on behalf of the state. Support, value and if necessary, re-establish small church communities as an ordinary structure of the Church, rather than closing them down and making mega-parishes. Small worshipping communities provide a sense of belonging and care that a large parish cannot. Our Church was built and grown in this way.

To reform our Church. The current administrative structure alienates the laity. It has placed clerics in charge of both spiritual and financial decisions. We need to see a separation firstly of the spiritual and financial administrations. There is no need for clerics to be involved in the financial, while on the spiritual they need to become helpers in spiritual formation, not in charge. The current parish is still ruled by the priest. Nothing has changed. Many younger people do not bother coming, while older people pray that one day our Church may reform itself, meanwhile we know that involvement of laity is just empty talk.

Each of us to step up and become more involved in the life of the Church. To take care of and educate our children in the way of faith. Church and schools to work more hand in hand. Nurture and guidance of youth. More kids Masses and Kids' club. Just as people mature in their faith, that the Church mature in its attitude etc. to women which is a process it is already going through, thanks to changes in society's attitude to women. Clericalism, which is a broad term, had done a lot of damage, both internal and external. Change is necessary. Support for clergy is necessary as they see the anger, sadness etc. around them. Not reactionary. A compassionate Church rather than a legalistic Church. Do away with the medieval dress codes for Bishops—simplicity is important—not dress-ups. A Church that is open to being challenged. Just today the priest said that the Church is humiliated—perhaps the word should have been humbled. Christian communities who gather even when the priest is not available.

*To keep our feet firmly on the ground—the KISS principle is very useful here—live as Christ taught us and not get overcome by all the extraneous "churchy" things.

* To be humble as individuals and especially as an organization.

* If "Church" is the people as we are so often told, then we the Church need to be treated as equal partners to the 'hierarchy' as we decide how to celebrate our faith especially at a local level. Am happy with my parish but get annoyed by directives from 'on high' e.g. about music and wording—I recognise the need for these this to reflect Catholic theology but I think that the 'people' are often treated as idiots by those on high.

* Make women equal partners to men in the life of the Church, which includes the possibility of women priests.

* Reaffirm and implement the principles of Vatican II.

* Jesus lived 2000 years ago and taught within the culture and knowledge of His time. We (the Church) need(s) to do likewise—move into the 21st century and live His teachings within the knowledge and culture of the modern world.

* Jesus taught the world a lot in not too many words. He didn't spell out HOW to live his teachings so it makes sense that we will be living His words differently to those people 2000 years ago.

* The vestments the priest wears at Mass and the 'formality' of the Mass have their place BUT there needs to be a much simpler alternative that can be offered either regularly or at least some of the time. In general, we are a fairly relaxed society and much of the 'formality' appears silly to many people (even those who understand what the Mass is all about).

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| <p>* Catholic education needs to include a warts and all history of the Church; an understanding of the Christian values that underpins our stance on social justice; the value of being part of a community of people with common values (even if your faith is a bit shaky) ... among everything else.</p> <p>* Allow priests the choice to marry.</p> |
| <p>He wants the innocence and souls of his children protected. Specifically, for Catholics to stop being the silent Mass, who protest quietly and without numbers. A hard and loud stance against abortion, gender identity activism and sexualisation of culture.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extra ordinary ministers should only be used in extra ordinary circumstances - The tabernacle should be at the front of the Church, and in the centre. |
| <p>I think God is asking for Catholics to focus on catechesis of its members about actual Church teaching. We need to stop trying to compete on a secular entertainment level, which the Church will always lose, and start to appreciate the richness, mystery and depth of Catholic liturgy and tradition. Identify where vocations are coming from, and copy the methods of that parish. From my experience, these are usually more traditional parishes, where young people are challenged by their faith, not pandered to and infantilised. Make Christ the centre of our churches, both literally in the tabernacle, as well as in broader Church activities. When I bring my children to Mass, I want them to know that this is a holy place, not just another hall. I want them to be able to see and hear the beauty of the Catholic faith through the use of reverent sacred art and music. I would love for them to have the opportunity to receive Jesus while kneeling at an altar rail, and generally to see a greater focus on reverence encouraged during the Mass. Children and adults, need to be able to recognise they're at a Catholic Mass where the King of Creation is substantially present, not feel like they've wandered into any old community sing-along gathering.</p> |
| <p>For 2000 years, God has been asking: Repent, follow His commandments, and go and make disciples of all nations. To repent, we must comprehend our own sinfulness. However, the sense of sin has diminished in our society. Instead of seeking the will of God and conforming our lives to the often-painful reality of this, many instead seek to conform God's will to their own desires. This is shown in calls to change 'hard' teachings of the Church to better reflect 'lived experience'. In reality, we are fallen, broken human beings, needing God's healing. But unless we are willing to share our ailments with him, seeking true medicine, he cannot heal them. We must seek the truth of God, look into our hearts, and repent. To follow His commandments, we must know them. The Catholic Church has a rich, vibrant tradition incorporating both faith and reason, which enables her to clearly define and articulate the moral and spiritual law. This has made her teachings underpin all civilised culture today. Sadly, many feel that a tired, corrupt and materialistic secular culture with no philosophical underpinnings can somehow inform the Church's moral direction. But a society that does not value such basic Christian concepts as life, family, marriage, chastity, temperance, prudence and self-control cannot be expected to somehow provide the answers to problems in our Church that all too often stem from a lack of the very same virtues. We need to reclaim a sense of our moral foundations. To make disciples of all nations, we must convert those nations, not follow their practices. Otherwise Christ would have taught 'Go and become disciples to all nations...' Making disciples of all nations requires giving them one fundamental thing: a</p> |

relationship with God. This must happen in two ways. Firstly, the salvation of souls is the whole point of Catholicism. If we make the world a nice place but do not save a single soul, then the Catholic Church is pointless. Jesus came to save souls. We must reclaim a focus on souls, and a missionary zeal. By this the Church spread and grew at every time in history. By contrast, when the Church has ceased turned to peripheral issues, it has declined. More importantly, salvation of souls is a duty that we owe our neighbours in charity. Secondly, worship must focus on God, not each other, or our feelings. The Blessed Sacrament must become the centre of our worship. Furthermore, we must actively participate in the Mass without 'having a job'. Many feel that they cannot participate without a 'ministry' (job), when they have a job already—worshipping quietly from their pew. As a result, many feel they are somehow excluded if they can't be the priest, which is like saying only the teacher participates in the classroom. If we truly worship Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and develop a true relationship with God, in the Mass, then we will have an enlivened spiritual life which will help us proclaim the faith publicly.

There are new forms and forums of community to help people connect—internet etc. Leadership The changing role of leadership and what is a leader/ who is a leader? How do we help the Church to respond to overseas seminarians and their understanding the Australian Context? Do we need to look at new ways and groups for seminarians: older men, married people—finding from within community?

We are called to return to our roots. The gospel's a guide for personal and institutional behaviours and attitudes, Small, local praying communities not necessarily with residential priests should be part of the mainstream.

Stop committing sins especially mortal ones, live as humans are asked to live, i.e. keep the 10 commandments of God and the 7 of his Church.

I think that God is calling on the Catholic Church to enter into the digital age with open arms. I think that for the Church to continue into the digital age, Mass needs to be accessible to everyone, at any time, from anywhere and this can be done through websites such as YouTube. Individuals such as Professor Jordan Peterson are laying the ground work for this new form of communication that the Church needs to embrace to flourish into and beyond the 21st century. I think that God is calling on the Catholic Church to become a major presence online. I think that God is also asking Australia to recognise that although we live in a country that consists of people from multiple backgrounds, cultures and religions, we must acknowledge that each and every one of us is an individual who is responsible for their own actions and self-improvement.

- The Church must recover the teaching of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- If the Church is going to offer sound guidance, regular consultation is needed at diocesan level like Pope Francis has begun at international level.
- If Church is going to recover its evangelising energy and reflect the gentleness, mercy and forgiveness shown by Christ, it is going to need root and branch reform.
- Our crisis is a crisis of leadership which will only be solved when the hierarchy engage with the faithful.

- Pope Francis speaks of the need to promote a sound decentralisation (Evangelii Gaudium 16) in the discernment of local issues. The hierarchy should adopt this position.
- All proposals for breaking down the culture of clericalism and Church authority are seen to be exercised transparently, accountably and inclusively.
- What the community actually believes should be taken into consideration when the Church is formulating its theology. E.g. the Synod on family, people felt the Church was willing to engage so they were prepared to offer suggestions.
- In the context of child sexual abuse, the Church has broken the trust. Because of failure of hierarchy to respond truthfully and effectively, Catholics find it difficult to take seriously anything they say about relationships, gender and sexuality. For example, the lack of experience of family life by celibate bishops and priests.
- Senior leaders have not recognised the need for cultural and structural change.
- The Church needs to examine governance structures such as optional celibacy, women in ministry, injustice of treating men and women unequally.
- Faithful need to have access to Christ's teachings of love, equality and justice.

That we live in the real world. Not ignore all that is going on around us, and being unable to 'bend'. That we spend much less time on pomp and ceremony and much more on compassion and empathy...and helping the poor and marginalised—action and not just words. I think He is asking us to be decent human beings. And not to 'hide' behind the facade of our Church. We need to stop acting like a secret society—be more open and transparent. Despite all that has happened with the Royal Commission, there is still very much an air of 'closed shop' when it comes to clergy—a very protectionist attitude, which needs to disappear! Every person is accountable and should be seen to be accountable. Stop worrying about buildings and start worrying about people. Does it matter if a cathedral has a spire? Not only people outside the Church community query the value of such material things when money is tight and could be practically spent elsewhere. I think God is asking us to move with the times, be open and welcoming to all—and we are not at present. Whilst holding fast to our dogma, we need to be understanding and considerate of the beliefs and views of others—try to understand where they are coming from—maybe then they will do the same for us. I think He is asking us as an organisation to be more united—we seem to have so many different arms and branches in our administration—perhaps if we were more united and streamlined, we'd actually be more efficient at what we're trying to achieve. And He's asking us to work collaboratively—the Church class system has had its day. People want to be respected and treated as equals. While giving our clergy due respect, the days of 'yes Father' are over and the clergy need to accept and embrace this.

1. Be truly faithful to the gospel. Put the gospel before the Church. Too often we have placed the Church before the gospel message. 2. Bring back the 3rd Rite of Reconciliation. The 1st rite is almost dead. We might be able to save the sacrament of God's forgiveness if we bring back the 3rd Rite. 3. Get rid of the new translation. It often does not make sense to listeners. It is also hard to proclaim.

The exercise of power in the Catholic Church is of grave concern to us. 1) The exclusion of women from ordained ministry is an example. Being forbidden even to discuss the possibility of ordaining women is an abuse of our human right to exercise our God-given ability to think and discern. 2) Sexual abuse of children in the Church is a scandal demonstrating the abuse of power against the powerless. We understand that bishops were caught in a very difficult position, not knowing how to handle such situations but the Church culture which allowed such abuse to take place and be covered up, must be radically changed to ensure such tragedy does not reoccur. 3) The way Bishop [-] has been treated by the Church is also a scandal to us. One of the reasons people feel reluctant to take part in the Plenary Council discussions is because they have witnessed what has happened to such a pastoral Bishop who tried to work with people for the betterment of their spiritual and Church lives.



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 mindset in the Australian Church being transformed so that the pre-existing power structures in the Catholic Church that led to the horrific sexual abuse crisis will never occur in the future?
2. What is the Australian Church doing in a realistic way to prepare for the priest shortage?
3. How is the Australian Church recognising the gifts and availability of women [in] the service of the Church?
4. How is the Australian Church encouraging the resources and ministry gifts of our aging population?
5. How is the Australian Church ministering to our aging population?
6. How is the Australian Church meeting the epidemic of mental illness in our Australian society?
7. How is the Australian Church recognising the high educational levels of many of its laity?
8. How is the Australian Church seeking the help of the Holy Spirit to understand the perceived shortage of vocations to the priesthood and religious life?
9. How are our priests and bishops trained to learn to facilitate and welcome the gifts and expertise of the laity?
10. What can be done in schools to help young people become responsible adults, who will uphold and support the future Church in Australia?
11. How can the language in the Mass be re-worded to be meaningful to the younger generation?
12. What does it mean to be Catholic in 2020?
13. Will the Church become more open and inclusive?
14. How will the Church work on getting youth more engaged?
15. How do we get more parishioners to participate in Church life?
16. Will the Church allow priests to marry?
17. Will the Church change its teaching to allow divorced and remarried Catholics to receive communion?
18. Will the Church consider ordaining women as priests and deacons?
19. Will the Church empower laity to take a bigger part in the functioning of the Church, as we, in fact, are the Church?
20. Will structures be put in place to make priests accountable for managing the parishes?

21. How do we equip our children and teachers to adequately understand the essentials of the Catholic Faith while honouring the good lives they lead and their different ways of learning?
22. Why cant we attend a weekday mass when it isnt possible to go on Sunday?
23. Do we really listen to our young people and include them in our discussions?
24. Why are women excluded from top level decision-making?
25. What more can we do to overcome the stigma of abuse in the Church?
26. Why cant our priests marry?
27. How is the Church addressing the culture of cover up in the Church (sexual abuse, etc.)?
28. What is the Church doing to change with the times?
29. How is the Church making changes to suit the youth of today?
30. What makes the Church relevant in todays world?
31. When will the Church consider that women may become deacons?
32. Will the Bishops put aside their self-interest and actually listen to what the priests and laity have to say?
33. Can the Church in Australia be truly inclusive?
34. Can the role of women be recognised at all levels of the organisation?
35. Can people of all sexual orientations be truly welcome?
36. Can we be more ecumenical in our celebrations?
37. Can we be more accepting of the brokenness and frailty of relationships?
38. Can the Church of Australia live more sustainably?
39. What is the Church's plan to combat the growing problem of child abuse?
40. How come abortions are seen as frowned upon?
41. How are you making changes to accommodate the present and future generations and changes in society's beliefs such as gay marriage?
42. What is the hierarchy of the Catholic Church doing about the acts of sexual abuse within the Church?
43. Are we going to treat the cause as to why people dont attend Church, not just the symptoms?
44. Are we going to actually acknowledge the hurt that the Catholic Church has experienced?
45. When are we going to admit to our wrong?
46. Will the voice of all the people of God be heard at the Plenary Council?
47. Are the Bishops as the final decision makers at the Plenary Council sufficiently aware of the faith challenges facing families?
48. When and how can all submissions be shared with the Catholic people?
49. How can the Church become inclusive of all voices?
50. How can we make the liturgy more meaningful for the people who gather?
51. How can bishops become more involved in the lives of the people and engage in conversations not as an authority figure but as a listener and pastoral presence?
52. Is the Church and in particular its current leaders, serious about change in Australia?
53. The Church needs to look inward and ask itself: Why are we losing priests?
54. What are we doing to preserve, protect and flourish this planet that is our only home and reveals the divine to us?
55. How do we find a way to value and support our clergy, but avoid clericalism?
56. How do we accept and increase lay involvement in leadership and ministry without it being tokenism?

57. How can we expect the Church to grow, or even to maintain its current numbers, when adults are so poorly catechised?
58. What is the actual purpose of the Plenary Council that the Church is trying to achieve?



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 37 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.

In the 1970s I was training to become a teacher and I was actively involved in the Catholic community in my university setting. My younger sister and I were living together. At that time she did not share my values or lifestyle in an explicit way. She suddenly became quite sick and could not attend work and had great difficulty getting out of bed. To my utter dismay I eventually discovered that she was pregnant. She was absolutely afraid to reveal her plight to our farming parents in the country. I thought that I would have to leave university and get a job in order to pay our growing bills. I was having trouble sleeping and the university work load became insurmountable. One day I was dragging myself home past the chaplaincy door and the priest chaplain called to me. He asked me to come in and share my problems. I replied that I had an insurmountable burden but since it was someone else's I was not at liberty to share. He said that he had noticed that I was not myself and at that rate I would not survive if I did not share the deep problem. I did share. He listened empathically and non-judgmentally it was the beginning of the enormous load being shared by others. He asked that I bring my sister in to chat to him. My sister agreed, and he convinced her to contact our parents. Initially my father reacted very badly but my mother convinced him to help us. Our mother came and stayed and helped us. My father brought in much needed food supplies because we had been living on the poverty line. All we could do on my teacher's scholarship was pay our rent and we had no money for food left over with my sister no longer working. All along the chaplain priest was never judgmental. He facilitated my return to my Catholic community and welcomed my sister to join our community. Gradually we were able to tell out community of our predicament and they became wonderfully supportive. When I turned 21 we had a wonderful community Mass in our flat with the chaplain saying the Mass. When my niece was born she became the youngest member of our community. When my sister met a young Catholic trainee teacher and married, many of our Catholic community attended the wedding. This priest through his wonderful empathetic ministry was able to transform our lives. What was a deeply frightening burden was turned around and we became members of a vital vibrant Catholic community. The priest had enormous gifts in the use of his wonderful ministry. Through the wonderful ministry of this university chaplain our lives were transformed and we became vital and integral members of a vibrant Catholic community. As time progressed, both my sister and I with our husbands spent considerable time working in Indigenous Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. What we had received we were able to give back to very

vulnerable communities. We had known very difficult times. This wonderful Catholic priest and rescued us and reconnected us to a vibrant caring Catholic community.

My faith was developed mainly through what I learnt at Catholic Schools and from attending Mass. I was fortunate to listen to many homilies that didn't just repeat the Gospel. Instead the priests related the gospel to what was happening in the world around us. I was disappointed when our children, who attended Catholic Schools, told us their teachers told them they didn't have to go to Mass. I was sad to hear that a secondary teacher told the class "that if there was a God, He would not allow wars." and "you didn't have to be married to have a baby". The children rarely saw their teachers at Mass. I felt the faith we were trying to pass onto the children was not, in general terms supported by the school community.

I converted to the Catholic church when I was 25, and have always attended various Novus Ordo parishes around Australia and the world. 12 years on, I feel saddened to attend churches where the building itself is stripped of beauty, the Mass stripped of the rituals that point us to the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. I feel saddened to have been berated for genuflecting before receiving Holy Communion. I would like to attend Masses that deeply reflect the beauty and importance of the sacrifice that we are so privileged to witness. I think when we find again this solemnity and beauty, people will be drawn to see that there is something special worth looking into.

How sad I have felt when approaching a priest to have a sacramental blessed, and have been mocked for thinking there is any value in the blessing of an object. How sad, to be reprimanded for bowing to the Blessed Sacrament in Holy Communion, and told that I may as well bow to every person I meet in the street. How sad, to have to search high and low for any mention of finding an NFP instructor, or to see it mentioned on a church bulletin. How sad, when the priest seems reluctant to mention the dogma of Hell. How sad, when my priest has not heard of the special blessing for the medal of St Benedict. How sad to go through RCIA and barely touch on Church teachings, and be told that there used to be priestesses by the lay person running the show. These are my experiences as an Australian Catholic.

I was raised by a devout Catholic mother and an atheist father. Arguing with my father over faith beliefs actually strengthened my commitment to be a Christian. My faith has developed over the years with studies in theology and participation in retreats and missionary activities; however my faith has been challenged by my work as assistant principal and principal in catholic schools. In my work as a sessional university academic I am again encountering a lack of interest in organised religion. Atheism is increasing amongst young adults but I have hopes that their spirituality can be reawakened.

Each member of our group expressed our dismay and regret that the Third Rite of Reconciliation has been forbidden in the Australian Church. We recall the moving and faith promoting experience of attending Third Rite ceremonies and lament the fact that our families are no longer welcomed into the Church for such celebrations.

In our diocese many lay people from far flung areas, at their own expense and inconvenience, have trained for ministry but never been allowed to carry it out. There is a feeling of

disillusionment about, having responded to the call after Vatican II to participate in the full life of the Church, they have been sidelined and not entrusted with the exercise [of] their ministry.

The Church of the fifties is not the Church of the 21st Century. In the past the social life of parishioners was built around the parish. In the present the Church risks becoming irrelevant in the lives of young people, working families and in some cases the ageing. A vibrant Church requires the inclusion of all, a place where people can feel 'at home' and an atmosphere in which all voices can be respectfully heard.

28 years ago this month, I received the sacraments of Holy Communion and Confirmation as a young adult (23). Maturity, a faith filled wife, and holy priests and religious have driven my desire for understanding, knowledge and wisdom of my faith and the Catholic Church that has enabled me to recognise God's truth in how he wants us to lead our lives. I recognised early that God is extremely merciful for our fallenness, but also that He also asks us to change our ways and return to Him. I believe that I am blessed not to be a 'cradle Catholic', and that my later in life conversion gave me the ability to learn and understand what it means to be Catholic, and the genius of Catholicism.

Story # 1—I grew up in a loving large Catholic family where our religion was taught at home and my mother prepared me for my first Holy Communion. We lived in the country and had to take it in turns to attend Sunday Mass because our numbers made it impossible for us to all fit in the car for the 20 km trip to church. Unfortunately this was in the days when you were asked if you had attended Mass on Sunday and no quarter was given if you had not. Lack of understanding and charity. However I did become a nun and hopefully learned from my experiences to be understanding and charitable particularly to the poor and marginalized e.g. Papua New Guinea and the Kimberley. Story #2—I grew up in a Catholic family and due to distance to nearest Catholic school attend a state run school for most of my education. My mother taught us our religion however my father grew away from the Church and became quite scathing about the hypocrisy of the priests/hierarchy and those attending Mass. Dad saw the hand of God in nature. From my own experience my connection to the institution of the Church has wavered up and down however my faith has remained steadfast and still does. It has helped that I am married to a very strong Catholic with a deep belief in his faith.

As young people, the members of our group were given faith enhancing experiences appropriate for our time. Children and young people of today live in a very different world and their faith nurturing requires experiences which acknowledge and integrate the reality they face.

Most of us who have contributed to this discussion have had fairly good experiences in the Church but are convinced we must change if we are to grow!

A married couple in our group recounted an experience, when the morning after their daughter's 21st birthday party, held on their property in far flung NSW they, with others, prepared a simple liturgy and invited the young people who had stayed overnight to participate. Without exception each young person happily attended and many later remarked to the hosts what a meaningful and enjoyable ceremony they had experienced.

In working closely with priests and now the bishop it has been interesting. The vast majority of parish priests do great pastoral work, but the hierarchy of the church is alienating and has structures built up around it that as a woman make me feel excluded and alienated. I am dubious about the whole plenary, I've been involved in many group sessions, while this is my individual submission the same things keep coming up again and again (Pell, scandals of abuse, women in the church ignored, celibacy not working etc.) I fear we won't be listened to. And I can't remain in the Church if you keep not listening. Change needs to happen.

Thirty years ago I returned to Mass on a weekly and more basis. This was as a direct consequence of the ministry of a parish priest who welcomed people without judgement, who responded to more contemporary worship and who laughed a lot!

I think the Bishops live in an ivory tower and have no idea how much damage has been done to the Church by the sexual abusing priests and bishops. It is very hard being a Catholic today as people I encounter wonder how I can be part of an organization which for years has allowed sexual abuse to occur.

Women perhaps have had children and therefore have lived "on the ground". There is nothing like a child to "ground" a person in the reality of facing the problems of every-day life.

I have a negative opinion of the Church and believe that all religion should be eradicated. I don't like how the priests are rude and don't use their manners.

I don't believe in much of or any of what the churches and the bible say as I feel it belittles people and does not accept the beliefs of others and I don't think a higher power would not accept us for the little things such as being gay or not attending church. I think that people interpret the bible wrongly and it has led to a lot of nasty and horrible people in the world. I think that religion should not be taken as seriously and it should just be something that people believe in individually and shouldn't be broadcast to the whole world. I believe in science and I believe in a higher power but not specifically God and Jesus.

I don't believe that I've had an encounter with faith. My faith is very weak if there at all.

I go through phases with my faith. Sometimes I feel strongly about my faith and the Church and sometimes I don't. I do always believe in God. I might not understand the bible or the priests, but I believe in God, a higher power, a protector. Some of the time, I feel at peace in the Church and I feel ignited by God's fire and the Holy Spirit.

Members of our group experienced the pre-Vatican [II] Church and the freshness and hope the Vatican Council brought to our faith lives. Sadly, we have witnessed the gradual drawing back from the spirit of the Council and as a result our children and grandchildren are becoming more and more removed from the Church. The Church of the fifties and sixties can no longer make sense to our younger generation. We are living in very different times and unless the Church can respond to the needs of the people of the twenty-first century we are afraid that the Church that we love will continue to become more and more irrelevant in people's lives.

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| the spirit of Vatican II and the affect this has had on the faith journey of our young people. The present world is very different from the world of the fifties and sixties. The Church risks becoming irrelevant in the lives of the present generation unless it can engage with people, whatever their situation and be a beacon of hope and a genuine community where the love of God is experienced and shared. |
| On one of the infrequent visits of the bishop to the parish, a member of our group put to him an alternative view from that expressed by the bishop. The parishioner was quickly brushed aside with the comment that he wouldn't understand. Besides being ignored as a person the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation to the enrichment of both was lost. |
| I am grateful for my heritage as an Irish Australian from both my mother's and father's families. They were from counties Galway and Clare respectively and migrated to Australia in the 1850s because of the potato famine and the perfidy of Albion generally. That has helped to put today's struggles and problem in perspective. I am grateful to have experienced Jesus in people who have lived gospel values, many of them women and one of them a bishop (the late [-] of [-]). However, I have come to understand that most latter-day true saints are and will remain unrecognised outside their local sphere of influence. |
| One member of our group related a story wherein a laywoman undertook the necessary studies to be able to take a leadership role in the Diocese. She however, was told that her services were not required and found herself in the position of wanting to serve the Church and not given the opportunity to do so. |
| Pastoral care from three priests of great love and wisdom has helped my faith grow in spite of divorce, annulment, another divorce and now de facto marriage. My loving sisters RSCJ are still in my life. It has been an irregular journey but I have been doing my best according to my conscience. |
| I am 52 at the moment but became a Catholic at 23. I believed what the Church stood for and loved its mystical beauty. In all the parishes that I have lived in, the question has come up about getting people engaged in the Church again as attendance goes down, but no one ever seems to listen. The answer is "put God first, and do his Holy will." I will not leave the Church because it is what Jesus created for us, but sometimes it would be really easy to walk away with the wishy washy clinical Church that we have now. |
| I have been a member of an ecumenical home prayer group for over 25 years and it has been the most enriching experience. We open a passage of Scripture and because we come from different backgrounds we have several versions of the Bible. Then we have a 'round the table' discussion on what we believe the passage is saying to us. Often this leads to life experiences that are shared. There has been laughter and tears but always support and encouragement. We finish in prayer and then share a cuppa. Often it is over the cuppa that the most sharing and nurturing is done. We are 'family' and I look forward to each meeting with enthusiasm and expectation. I always come away feeling uplifted, enriched and blessed. |
| World Youth Day events in 2008 moved me and my family. My son was a student in a [particular religious order] school. He assisted all visiting [religious brothers] from around the world boarding |

at his school. We his parents became involved and were moved by the faith and passion of all these cultures. My son's faith and spirituality was moved in a way never experienced before seeing everyone united as one sharing unconditional love and faith. I personally have enjoyed and grown from my Catechist work, teaching alongside people of other churches. I also have a background where my family is of Eastern Christian background. This has been a great influence on my life.

We are very aware that the world in which we grew up is dramatically different from the modern world. The Church however has not changed with the times even though the Second Vatican Council set us on a pathway to 'read the signs of the times'. Much of the progress which gave us hope after Vatican II has been slowed or stopped. Let us again respond to the call of the Council and demonstrate that the Church in Australia has a future for all.

I am very lucky to have had terrific parents and brothers and sisters and to have had a great education in Catholic schools. Most of the members of the Church have influenced me by their actions in looking after the poor and giving me a sense of social justice. The Jesuits told me to question everything and wait for the correct answer to come, which usually happens, sometimes more slowly.

A very special moment that I can vividly recall was when I was about to make my first communion and our teacher was telling us that it is not the party after Mass but the fact that we were receiving Jesus in Communion for the very first time. That day I was about to leave the school and I looked up to our Catholic Church and an amazing feeling of love and eagerness came over me of how special it would be. I was the 10th of twelve children and our mother was the most loving mother one could ask for. We were very poor in the money side of things but rich in love of our mother. Saturday evenings were our preparations for going to Mass on Sunday morning. Our shoes had to be polished and clothes ready and was reminded that we could not eat until we received Jesus in Communion. We walked about three miles to the church and back and our tummies rumbled for want of food but that didn't seem to matter. Our house was old and our mum used to say "we could shake hands through the cracks but that's ok Jesus was born in a stable with animals around". Our big family came to Mass and sat together even our dog followed us and would curl up under our pew until it was time to leave. It was a family time with everyone as we all prayed together.

We have been truly tested but my faith will survive, unlike many others who are choosing to walk away because of the shame of belonging to a church with priests who have abused children. Here is an opportunity to address the problems and revitalise our Church.

I'm a cradle Catholic whose love of parish was shaped by my formative years coinciding with the height of the family groups' movement and an active parish life in the 80's. I have spent many years since as an adult searching or trying to regain the feeling of belonging and of coming home that parish was for me then. I have lived in urban and rural communities. Raising my children in a rural community I grieve the lack of diversity of charism and expression of faith they have available and supplement opportunities as much as possible. Though faith and theology are not strangers to our dinner table conversation I see my teenagers with strong faiths grow weary of defending the Church to their friends. I will be surprised if they as adults don't walk away from the

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| <p>Church, not because they don't love it but because it has failed to look and act like the faith they love and believe. I love the faith but I do not love the institution. I have stayed to work from within, but I don't see generations after me that will rebuild more likely a generation who will start again. Maybe that is a good thing. I don't know I'm torn. Maybe I do love the Church in spite of all its brokenness. In the last 10 months working in a charism of a religious order, I finally feel like I have found home again. I'm being nourished and formed again, not just wrung out for all I have to give.</p> |
| <p>A Muslim student willing to attend Christian SRE classes and participate in the Christmas Play as Joseph. It was the highlight of the year. An ecumenical procession on Palm Sunday, walking from one church to another singing and praying united as one. World Youth Day 2008. Attending Catholic schools. Participating in community service activities.</p> |
| <p>As this is a response from a group of people from our community, it is difficult to share AN experience of faith or of the Church, but there are general themes from all the groups. The importance of community and opportunities to pray together (not necessarily celebrating weekly Mass) were strong for the group. Their families were important in their development of their faith and their involvement in the parish community. Even when there may have been a time that they "drifted" away from the "establishment", they felt connected and knew they are important to Jesus. These people have struggled with various situations and injustices (e.g. divorce, LGBTQI, unpaid parish work, being unheard) throughout their lives, but have remained faithful to the Church because of their relationship with Jesus.</p> |
| <p>Some of the wonderful people that I have met in my life, my mother being the main one, and a particular Mercy Nun that I met in my 20's, have definitely shaped and developed my faith.</p> |
| <p>I have been part of a small suburban parish, and moved to the country and been part of worshipping communities from small (<50) to large (>2000). In spite of being involved in various liturgical ministries I have rarely felt part of the large community. When I was absent for a significant time due to ill health, no-one noticed. They didn't even contact me when I didn't turn up for rostered responsibilities! Each time a small parish was closed we lost some of the members who could not/would not travel to a larger centre where they felt unknown.</p> |
| <p>Fortunately I have met a priest in my life who already lived the life of being a servant to his flock. Never did he 'manage' his people. He just loved and welcomed. And this was from a priest who was very orthodox in his beliefs, in no way what you could describe as a liberal Catholic. From this experience I know that the reformation needed is possible.</p> |
| <p>Since the Church in Australia is part of the Church in the world, I'd like to say that I was appalled at the pictures of all those bishops and cardinals in Rome (at the meeting about sexual abuse of children) all dressed up in their formal attire—red and purple included. It looked arrogant and completely out of touch. How about a touch of humility in the way they present themselves—like an ordinary suit. And the 'minors' can be called 'children'—the term is much more to the point.</p> |
| <p>The best thing that's happened to me was being brought up amongst great people of faith at [-] College and by attending the [-] Study centre. The Opus Dei priests are incredible and the people</p> |

practice the faith truly and honestly. Not this washed out version that holds no one for long as seen so many places these days.

I, like many young Catholics, fell away from practising my faith as soon as I left the protective bubble of my school community. The consistent message I was hearing every weekend at Mass was a washed out homily of "Be nice to people, everybody should love everybody but don't worry about all the hard issues because Jesus will love you no matter what you do". I stopped going to Mass, because what was the point? There wasn't anything different there to what I could get from feel-good morning talk shows, and I could watch those from the comfort of my lounge. It was only after years of being burnt by the false promises of secular society that I started re-investigating the faith I had been raised in, and what attracted me most was not the sad attempt at being relevant by copying secular music, or trying to modernise the Church. Rather, it was the ancient beauty of the Church, the richness of her heritage, the loving focus on Truth behind every "hard teaching"... here was a Church that loved me enough not to lie to me, that had conviction in its teachings because it had 2000 years of BRILLIANT men and women explaining timeless problems and how to address them. This Church didn't bend with the whims of contemporary society—it spoke Truth, even (especially!) when contemporary society didn't want to hear it. I'm so grateful for the good and faithful priests I met who helped me discover the deeper side of the Catholic faith instead of the watered down version that sadly is all many Catholics hear.

A few anecdotes: I attended a diocesan synod discussion forum as a teenager. We went around the room, stating our opinion of what the Church needed at that time. The majority of the comments, from women aged 50-70, stated we needed more women's participation, including female clergy. I stated we needed greater male participation. I was the only male in the room, and the only person under 45. In a church full of women and run by women, not surprisingly there is a shortage of priestly vocations. By contrast, everywhere male participation is encouraged, particularly male singing, priestly vocations increase as does overall attendance. I have always been open about my faith with friends and colleagues, and have seen the conversion of several. Once, I had a difficult conversation in charity about a poor moral choice a friend had made. This resulted in his conversion to Catholicism, along with his whole family. I am convinced this could never have happened had I not raised a difficult truth with him. This must be our model of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ—truth in charity. Our wedding, in an old church, made good use of Catholic tradition, including incense, old hymns, some Latin. Afterwards, a friend exclaimed that he 'didn't know Catholics were so cool!' An atheist, he was surprised by the unexpected beauty of Catholic worship. Much can be said for the power of evangelisation in our Catholic traditions. A friend, a talented musician aged early 20s at the time, was involved in editing a 'hymn' book. After discussing why a certain hymn probably wouldn't get used very much due to its poor musical structure, one of the other panellists said, exasperated, 'But this is what young people want!' My friend, the youngest by more than 20 years, wasn't sure how to respond. It is apparent that some people in the Church have told themselves 'This is what people want!', and have missed the clear signs that they don't. An empty Church is a sure sign. A priest preaching in a Mass I was at went through a series of 'blockages' people face, including socially, economically and emotionally. It struck me as odd that he never mentioned spiritual blockages. Surely the primary concern for a priest should be removing spiritual blockages in our relationship with God and those around us! A

parish I attended noted they were removing confessionals, as they were 'under-utilised'. This is a regular form of circular reasoning. The sacrament isn't offered regularly, no-one attends. The priest notes no-one attends, so he doesn't offer it. The real answer is to offer it more, and they will come—this has been true of every parish I've seen that offers penance regularly. I read the life of St John Vianney as a teenager, and immediately considered whether I had a vocation to the priesthood. I know of similar cases where young men did become priests. Such simple methods of evangelisation as the lives of the saints are at our fingertips, and we make such little use of them.

In my life I have witnessed some good and holy priests. One told me a story which made me more aware of the Eucharistic Christ in the tabernacle. This priest is still young and a parish priest..

One member of the group shared an experience in a small country parish where the priest began to realise that the parish was in serious financial difficulty in the midst of the construction of a new church. Uncharacteristically, he shared the problem with the people. The parishioners rallied around, addressed the challenges and the construction of the church was successfully completed. People want to be included, to use their gifts and expertise and work together for a successful outcome in all areas of Church life.

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 Bathurst. Groups that did not provide a name were omitted from this table.

| Name of group | Group size |
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| Bathurst Correctional Centre | 600 |
| Sacred Heart Church, Wallerawang, 2845 | 100 |
| St Vincents Church, Portland, NSW 2847 | 80 |
| ST. JOSEPHS PARISH, GILGANDRA | 77 |
| MacKillop College Bathurst | 55 |
| St Josephs Parish Gilgandra | 40 |
| Bathurst | 40 |
| Duboo | 40 |
| Mudgee | 32 |
| The Assumption School | 20 |
| St Ignatius Parish Oberon | 15 |
| Faith Group | 13 |
| Orange | 12 |
| Portland Parish Pastoral Council | 11 |
| Bathurst Diocesan Pastoral Council - Worshipping God in Prayer and Sacrament Working Group | 10 |
| St Marys Parish | 9 |
| Group of parishioners | 8 |
| St Brigids Parish | 8 |
| Group of parishioners | 7 |
| Group of parishioners | 7 |
| Group of Parishioners | 7 |
| Group of parishioners | 7 |
| M. Tilston Family | 6 |
| Bathurst Diocesan Pastoral Council | 6 |
| Group of Parishioners | 6 |
| Group of parishioners | 6 |
| Group of parishioners | 5 |
| Bathurst Diocesan Assembly | 4 |
| Group of parishioners | 4 |
| Holly Family School Bathurst | Not stated |
| Gilganrda Parish Small Group | Not stated |

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