

HOW IS GOD CALLING US TO BE A CHRIST-CENTRED CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA THAT IS

# Prayerful & Eucharistic?



*Continuing the journey of Discernment  
toward the Plenary Council*

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of this great South land upon which we live, pray and work. We honour Elders past, present and future, and thank them for their sacrifice and stewardship.

We commit ourselves to the ongoing work of reconciliation and healing with all communities.

We acknowledge the lifelong trauma of abuse victims, survivors and their families, the failure of the Catholic Church to protect, believe and respond justly to children and vulnerable adults, and the consequent breaches of community trust.

We commit ourselves to fostering a culture of safety and care for children and vulnerable adults.



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*Please note: The discernment papers are the fruits of communal discernment, which does not necessarily reflect the individual perspectives of each of the group members. The Plenary Council team sincerely thanks all contributors.*



# Foreword

The commitment of time, faith and giftedness which has been so willingly given by the Chairs and Members of the Discernment and Writing groups over the past months is a witness to the work of the Spirit alive in our Church. As President of the Plenary Council, I wholeheartedly thank Sharon, Renee, Peter G, Peter H, Catherine and Selina for their leadership of the communal discernment process which has produced the fruits that can be found in these six thematic Discernment Papers. I also thank all the members, in particular the writers, of the Discernment and Writing groups, too many to name here individually. Thank you for responding to the call of the Spirit in this way. Your contribution has been a great blessing for the Church in Australia. Finally, thank you to the many individual people, families and groups who gave advice, shared wisdom and testimony, answered questions and provided support and guidance to the Discernment and Writing process.

The starting point for the Discernment and Writing groups was to reflect on our people's responses to the question: *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?* These responses were gathered during the first stage of discernment: Listening and Dialogue. The 17,500 written responses gave rise to six further questions for discernment, asking all of us to reflect upon how we are called by God to live and minister as the Catholic Church in Australia:

*How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is missionary and evangelising; humble, healing and merciful; prayerful and Eucharistic; inclusive, participatory and synodal; a joyful, hope-filled servant community; open to conversion, renewal and reform?*

The six Discernment papers are an important contribution to the Church in Australia's ongoing discernment toward the Plenary Council. They are the fruits of discernment themselves, and help all the faithful as we work together to listen to God, praying, listening, talking and writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Each paper provides a reflection of some elements of the relevant pastoral reality, articulates a theological vision, outlines a number of challenges to be overcome, suggests prioritised questions to be answered and develops some proposals for change.

The papers themselves, of course, now become an important contribution to the challenge and privilege of discernment in which we are all engaged. While not in any sense the final word on the six thematic areas which emerged from the Listening and Dialogue process, I encourage you to receive them in the spirit of faith and discernment with which they have been written. They both invite and challenge us to continue to "listen to what the Spirit is saying".

Yours sincerely in the Lord,

**Most Reverend Timothy Costelloe SDB**

Archbishop of Perth,

President of the fifth Plenary Council for the Church in Australia.

# Executive Summary

God is calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is Prayerful and Eucharistic through being a **community** which **participates**, is **formed** and is on **mission**. Informed by a theological vision reflected in the Emmaus story, these four aspects represent key challenges articulated by the People of God. Christ continually calls each of us into deeper relationship, drawing forth the desire to participate in the Church community which gathers in his name, is formed in his gospel and is on mission in the world.

Being 'prayerful' is part of a broad tradition which entails being in constant connection with God in personal and communal ways. The word 'Eucharistic' is also best understood in the largest sense, encompassing all that draws us towards the Eucharistic table. As the Second Vatican Council taught, "Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7). The Eucharist draws forth thanksgiving for the ways Christ dwells within and among us. With this document, we seek to support God's people in their praise, reverence and service of the living God.

# I. Reflection on Listening and Dialogue responses

The Listening and Dialogue responses revealed the deep faith, integrity and sincerity of all the people who gave of themselves in their offerings. The responses included divergent opinions on various topics. At the same time, they showed a common faith in Christ and a common desire to follow his teaching in love of God and love of neighbour. They demonstrated a commitment to living the gospel of Christ and sharing the gospel with others, even in the midst of a largely secular culture. They expressed a love for the community of the Church, despite the well-documented failings of members of the community. They showed a desire to be a Christ-centred Church that is prayerful and Eucharistic.

The people of God seek to be invited to “full, conscious and active participation” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14) within the sacramental life of the Church. Participation is their “right and duty”. The faithful want to be empowered to live out their Baptism as disciples of Jesus called to the table of the Lord. This means encouraging the full participation of the baptised in liturgical celebrations such that they are “conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 48). Serving the community are the various particular ministries, lay and ordained. Many asked that ordained ministry be open to more people among the baptised.

Catholics aspire to understand their faith and how God takes flesh in their lives, and as such they care deeply about the language and words of the prayers at Eucharist. The respondents had varying views about what kind of translation of the Missal would best facilitate this encounter with God, some emphasising clarity of language and others dignity of expression. Pope Paul VI encouraged translators to combine both clarity and dignity. “The vernacular now taking its place in the liturgy ought to be within the grasp of all, even children and those with little education. But, as you well know, the language should always be worthy of the noble realities it signifies, set apart from the everyday speech of the street and the marketplace, so that it will affect the spirit and enkindle the heart with love of God.” (Paul VI, Address to translators of liturgical texts, 10 November 1965: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 57 (1965) 967-970).

God’s people, clergy and lay together, desire to nurture their relationships with God, one another and creation, and recognise the diverse ways to do this. With the disciple’s request “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1), Catholics yearn to meet God in daily life, and as such need encouragement through appropriate faith formation. Through this formation, God can shape us into deepening our spirituality within the life of the Church, engaging with scripture, encountering

God in worship and prayerfully developing our living relationship with Jesus Christ. Many long to be nourished by good preaching and beautiful music within the liturgy, and to experience deeply a sense of the sacred.

There is a yearning among God's people to nurture the communal aspect of our life as an Australian Church, while being open and welcoming to all who seek membership in Christ's body. This presents an opportunity for renewal as a Church living out our mission in the world: finding our life in Jesus,

being attentive to the needs of people, and offering encouragement. Grace moves God's people to ask questions grounded in the call we received at Baptism: how do we better nourish, accompany, give witness, support, invite, welcome, engage and be present to others, such that we all grow in holiness? A renewed sacramental life of the Church will enable us to better reverence the Spirit active in the experiences of our friends, neighbours and loved ones at the various stages of life.

**"Grace moves God's people to ask questions grounded in the call we received at Baptism: how do we better nourish, accompany, give witness, support, invite, welcome, engage and be present to others, such that we all grow in holiness?"**

## II. Pastoral Reality

Australian society is complex and rapidly changing. People are often stressed and pressured. In the context of a competitive, consumerist and secular society, the innate human desires for love, safety, belonging and connection remain fertile ground for experiences of faith.

The Catholic Church forms part of this changing Australia. We, as Church, experience institutional rejection, decline in the trust of our Church leaders and a great diminishment in those actively joining parish communities. Church marriages and funerals have declined in number and few Catholics receive the Sacrament of Penance regularly. Some still see Sunday as a day of rest, togetherness and sacred time, but in 2016 approximately 12% of all Catholics were regularly participating in the celebration of the Eucharist (National Centre for Pastoral Research, 2019).

We appreciate greatly the ministry of our priests who are serving in our parishes and we recognise how stretched they are in some of our country dioceses and large archdioceses. In many rural and isolated parishes of Australia, lay women and men lead Sunday liturgies in the absence of a priest. We recognise the missionary nature of the priests who have come to assist the Church in Australia at this time, although they face difficulties in adjusting to our local culture and in being able to communicate effectively with the faithful.

The family is the usual birthplace of faith and the Church recognises that parents are the first and foremost educators of their children (*Gravissimus*

*Educationis*, 3). The number of children receiving Baptism in Australia is declining (T. Dantis, personal communication). Families who seek this sacrament for their children may not be closely connected with a parish or faith community. Parents and caregivers continue to value Catholic education, even if their children are not baptised Catholic, with one out of every five Australian students attending a Catholic school (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Australian Catholic schools are diverse, vibrant environments where students and teachers have the opportunity to explore and experience the Catholic faith tradition. For many children, the first time they hear about God in a substantial way — or experience prayer and liturgy — is through attendance at a Catholic school. Teachers are, in many ways, actively on mission in their schools, reaching out to all and encouraging students and parents alike toward participation and witness.

There is great variety in the liturgical experiences of Catholics in Australia. In seeking spiritual nourishment, people tend to seek out their preferred style of liturgy. Overall there is a strong desire not to be merely spectators, but active participants. Meanwhile, cultural and linguistic diversity in our Church has grown. Migrants and refugees, many of them Eastern Catholics, have often brought with them a strong faith commitment. In Australia, the multicultural situation in local parishes provides the opportunity to celebrate a rich variety of liturgy and prayer, but also the challenge of maintaining unity in diversity.

The Eucharist is central to the spiritual lives of practising Catholics. Traditional spiritual exercises like the Rosary, the Divine Office, spiritual reading, *Lectio Divina* and grace at meals are less often part of their experience. Eucharistic adoration has increased in some places. Spiritual direction and formation in prayer is not always readily available. Many positive efforts have been made to support Catholics' knowledge of and engagement with scripture, and in particular the gospels.

The Church's contribution in the areas of education, health and other works of mercy provides opportunities for prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist, as well as an environment in which to encourage participation in the liturgical life of the Church.

**"The Church's contribution in the areas of education, health and other works of mercy provides opportunities for prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist..."**





### III. Theological Vision

A theological vision for a Christ-centred Church that is Prayerful and Eucharistic must meet the needs of our pastoral reality as a Church in Australia, a Church that is open to change. Throughout this Plenary Council process, we have sought the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through personal and communal prayer. As our response to God's presence, prayer leads to action in our lives.

As a prayerful and Eucharistic Church, we recognise Christ present with us in various ways. We also recognise that within the Church's practice there are many prayer forms and liturgical traditions. In the different liturgical families of East and West, we see a rich variety of rites, expressing the one prayer of Christ. As we celebrate the Eucharist, "the source and summit of the Christian life" (*Lumen Gentium*, 11), we draw on the heritage of our distinct liturgical families. Yet we are responding to the one call of God.

The Emmaus story (Luke 24:13-35) helps us to hear God's call to be a prayerful and Eucharistic people. Antecedents of both Word and Sacrament (Eucharist) can be found in this episode from the risen life of Jesus.

#### The Emmaus encounter

The two disciples are journeying to Emmaus three days after Jesus' crucifixion. They have had their hope dashed—that Jesus was the Messiah, the one to "free Israel" (v. 21). They are shaken and confused by the story of the women finding Jesus' tomb empty.

The episode begins with the disciples' profound disillusionment and discouragement and ends with the rekindling of hope.

Jesus seeks out the two disciples and walks alongside them as their companion, unrecognised (vv. 15-16). He questions them about their experience and hears out their story to the end. Only when they have finished does he begin to open the scriptures for them. He transforms their disillusionment to hope, reviving their faith, as he shows that the suffering and death were part of, not contrary to, the messianic hope emerging from the scriptures. In so doing, Jesus brings to light God's salvific plan for humanity.

When they come to their destination, the disciples beg Jesus to stay and be their guest at a meal. It is when Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to the disciples that they recognise him. They go back to the community in Jerusalem full of joy and hope, reflecting: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (v. 32). On hearing their gathered companions announce that "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" (v. 34), the two disciples then share their own experience.

## Implications and encouragement for a Prayerful and Eucharistic Church

At Emmaus, the Risen Lord offers eucharistic hospitality and expands our understanding of the Eucharist as seen in the accounts of the Last Supper. Like the two disciples, when we come to the Eucharist we are often a community of the disillusioned and disheartened. The heart of our confusion and discouragement may lie in not fully understanding that God's love remains in suffering and death, and consequently in our own forms of dying.

The Risen Lord forms the two disciples through meeting and journeying with them. In his 'accompaniment' Christ walks with the two and listens to the fullness of their human experience. We may seek to imitate Christ's way of relating and find in this story a model for formation in the "art of accompaniment" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 169). Our pilgrim Church can learn from Christ how to walk with all those who yearn for his company. "Unless we train ministers capable of warming people's hearts, of walking with them in the night, of dialoguing with their hopes and disappointments, of mending their brokenness, what hope can we have for our present and future journey?" (Pope Francis, Meeting with the Bishops of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, 28 July 2013).

The conclusion of the Emmaus story shows the experience of the two disciples and that of the group who remained in Jerusalem being shared, and so

becoming a wider community experience of the Risen Lord. Thus, the sharing of faith in small groups within the wider Church or parish community is of significance. Such graced encounters can deepen our awareness of and witness to Jesus' presence in our lives.

At prayer and at Eucharist, we encounter Jesus Christ in our hearts. The heart is the place of truth, of encounter, of decision, and thus the place for listening and discernment; "it is the heart that prays" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 2562-2563). Seeking help from the Holy Spirit, prayer can lead us to gratitude for God's gifts in daily life. We may ask for grace and so request "good things from God" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2559). "We do not know how to pray as we ought" (Romans 8:26), yet we may experience for ourselves the gift of prayer which is an encounter with God. We can dispose ourselves to meet Jesus each day, and thus experience being drawn into the life of the Trinity.

Our crucified and risen Lord remains with us today, calling us to return to our disillusioned community and find new ways to bring hope through the Good News. This mission is entrusted to us at Baptism, nourished in the Eucharistic celebration and enlivened by prayer in Jesus' presence.

**"Like the two disciples, when we come to the Eucharist we are often a community of the disillusioned and disheartened."**



## IV Major challenges

In responding to the movement of the Spirit among the people of God, four areas were discerned as major challenges for becoming a Christ-centred Church in Australia that is prayerful and Eucharistic: community, participation, formation and mission.

### Community

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20). The early Christians were known for how they loved each other. They shared faith over meals in their homes; moreover, they shared all they had with one another (Acts 4:32-35). Local people would recognise God’s love in the Christians and then seek to join their small communities of faith, before being invited to the Eucharistic table. This early Church experience acts as both inspiration and challenge for us today.

At Eucharist, we gather together as one body, unified as God’s people, and extend a welcome to all. Our parish and connected communities face the challenge of supporting people to incorporate the Gospel into their daily lives. Intimate prayerful communities and experiences help people to engage deeply with scripture, God and one another, thus complementing attendance at Sunday Eucharist — but they are rare. Meanwhile, some dioceses have amalgamated and clustered parishes, which has not been helpful in nourishing community.

Collaborative pastoral leadership can energise the faithful. For many within the Church, the Plenary Council ‘communal discernment’ has been a new and graced experience. By its very nature, communal discernment can build community. This important practice needs leadership and training, however, for many among the faithful are unfamiliar with its aspects of basic listening, depth of prayer, time and letting go of attachment to one’s own opinion.

Pope Francis’ image of Church as a ‘field hospital’ offers a challenge for us to become a community which offers people space to rest, heal and recover their vitality (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 46). To meet the needs of God’s people for forgiveness and healing, many Australian Catholics challenged the Plenary Council to ease the conditions on the celebration of the third rite of the Sacrament of Penance.

### Participation

When the Second Vatican Council described prayerful and Eucharistic participation, God’s people were encouraged to take up the call to “full, conscious and active participation” in the sacramental and daily life of the Church (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14). Within this vision, each member of the faithful is called to live out their Baptism as “priest, prophet and king” (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, 62). But today, the majority of God’s people do not participate in parish celebrations of Sunday Eucharist. Our priests are stretched and our parish liturgical ministries face difficulties finding

people willing to serve. We face the added reality that the prayers at Eucharist are translated in a style that many feel excludes them from engaging, and the Lectionary is not always accessible or inclusive in its language. These factors challenge pastors as they seek to “ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 11).

Many Australian Catholics challenged the Plenary Council to look at the priesthood of the baptised laity (1 Peter 2:9) and to consider what part they could have in liturgical ministry. The Church in Australia faces the challenge of addressing the needs of the many areas across our country where celebrations of the Eucharist are diminished due to factors including the decline in the number of celibate male ordained priests available to celebrate. More expressions of ministry for lay people, especially women, would enrich our sacramental life.

## Formation

In the Miracle of the Feeding (5000), Jesus calls his disciples to serve God’s people: “You give them something to eat” (Matthew 14:16). This command illuminates the challenge of formation for everyone in “the pilgrim Church” (*Lumen Gentium*, 48). The body of Christ, at every level of age, circumstances, and vocation, lay and ordained together, need encouragement in the journey to flourish in faith and grow into our full stature as Christian disciples.

When we are formed in the Gospel, God’s people recognise Jesus in daily life. At prayer and when celebrating the Eucharist, families, schools and parish communities encounter the living God together. When formation does not meet the needs of people, however, our communities of faith lose their vitality. Our sacramental processes from the Sacraments of Initiation to end of life have become disconnected in their timing, age and understanding and thus could be reformed to better ‘accompany’ the life of each person. We face the challenge of providing priests

and seminarians with the best possible supports to equip them as leaders of liturgical prayer. Similarly, our liturgical ministers, musicians and teachers need ongoing formation to encourage them in their service.

The disciples begged Jesus for guidance in prayer — “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1) — and he gave them the Our Father. God’s people would appreciate more formation in faith today, with integrating prayer and life. Couples and young people want help with important decisions, pointing to a wider challenge for the Church: formation in discernment. Following St Ignatius of Loyola and others, discernment invites God’s people to respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

## Mission

The Risen Christ gives us a mission to “go out into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). A prayerful and Eucharistic Church community is one that is equipped for mission — undertaking hands-on commitments among the human family. Our celebration of the Eucharist will always be incomplete while the poor go hungry, for “we cannot properly receive the Bread of Life without sharing bread for life with those in want” (Pedro Arrupe, 1976). The challenge will always be there to connect our prayer with action for justice, hearing “both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (*Laudato Si’*, 49).

Our sense of being a Eucharistic community is that we must expand to embrace everyone in our prayer and through our missionary outreach. We face the challenge that many people are disillusioned, wounded or isolated members of our community. “The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open ... This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself ‘the door’: Baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 47).



# V. Prioritised Questions and Proposals for Change

We explore four Prioritised Questions and subsequent Proposals for Change through the four areas which were named as major challenges: community, participation, formation and mission. These questions and proposals emerged during our discernment of this paper. Some of the proposals might be applicable across all our Catholic communities, whether of Eastern or Western rite. Some, such as the proposal to review current liturgical translations, might apply only to the Roman Rite.

## Community

**Prioritised question: How can we develop as a prayerful and Eucharistic community that is united in Christ while valuing and celebrating diverse spiritualities, customs and authentic liturgical practice?**

Our Church longs for community—to be one body, one Spirit in Christ (Ephesians 4:4). Can we reimagine the community model together as Church? How can our communities of faith today best bring people together, nourishing our relationships with God and one another (Cf. Acts 2:41-47)? How do we encourage collaborative pastoral leadership? How will the grace of the Plenary Council experience prepare a place for communal discernment within the life of the Church?

### **Proposals for change**

1. *Review and reimagine the model of parish and connected communities, to meet people where they are, to provide for their needs and to proactively support the diversity present in the Church.*
  - a. Implement a renewed emphasis on local communities within the life of the Church.
  - b. Equip each of our Church communities and organisations to support the creation of small communities of faith and life, centred on prayer with Scripture and sharing heart to heart. Encourage these small communities to gather regularly for the development of faith, the sharing of life over a meal and for spiritual nourishment.
  - c. Further develop formal ministries of hospitality and welcome within the life of the Church: to prioritise the engagement of all who participate in sacramental programs, to nurture our communal relationships of support for one another and to reach out to the wider community.
  - d. Learn from the experiences of our faith communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, when we were forced to find new ways to be community, to minister pastorally and to evangelise.

2. *Implement collaborative structures of pastoral leadership to reflect the partnership of the clergy and laity in bringing about the Kingdom of God in the world.*
  - a. Implement a new collaborative model for the leadership of parish communities to be led by appropriately qualified clerical, religious and lay leaders (Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11).
  - b. Prioritise the establishment of parish pastoral councils in consultation with clergy to enable shared responsibility over pastoral ministry and to ensure good governance.
  - c. Prioritise the establishment of diocesan pastoral councils to:
    - enable support for the bishop in his oversight of the diocese in its diversity;
    - support parish pastoral leaders, councils and pastoral associates;
    - commission and oversee diocesan pastoral renewal with clergy and laity participating together.
3. *Ease the conditions and limitations under which the local bishop may permit the celebration of the third rite of the Sacrament of Penance.*
  - a. This could be particularly useful and appropriate during the seasons of Lent and Advent. This would enable the whole community to come together in acknowledging our sin, wounds and brokenness and to celebrate in a sacramental liturgy the restoring and saving forgiveness of God.
4. *Encourage communal discernment as a privileged way of making important decisions in the life of the Church.*
  - a. Bring together clergy and lay leaders for training in communal discernment.
  - b. Encourage communal discernment for important decisions which affect the body of the Church. This could enliven participation in diocesan/parish pastoral plans and priorities for mission, while building community and inspiring commitment to that mission.

## Participation

### Prioritised question: How can we best encourage full, conscious and active participation in the liturgical and prayerful life of the Church community?

The people of God expressed their desire that their Church may facilitate the “full, conscious and active participation” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14) of God’s people within the liturgical and prayer life of the community.

Like those who participated in the 2019 Amazon Synod, the Church in Australia now has an opportunity to discern new expressions of ministry and liturgy that are appropriate to our needs and responsive to the Spirit. The Eucharist is central to the spiritual lives of Catholics. Every effort should be made to ensure that Australians, no matter where they live, “do not lack this food of new life and the sacrament of forgiveness” (*Querida Amazonia*, 89). While ordination continues to remain largely reserved to unmarried men, Pope Francis challenges our Church “to be open to the Spirit’s boldness, to trust in, and concretely to permit, the growth of a specific ecclesial culture that is distinctively lay” (*QA*, 94). As such, we need to be open to new positions and ecclesial services that

both men and women, married and unmarried, can undertake which “entail stability, public recognition and a commission from the bishop” (QA, 103). For instance, our Sunday Eucharist would be enriched if the voices of lay experience and insight were heard more frequently, especially those of women. Together we can find “other, better ways, perhaps not yet even imagined”, confident that “wherever there is a particular need, the Spirit has already poured out the charisms that can meet it” (QA, 104, 94).

### **Proposals for change**

1. *Expedite and implement a review of the current translation of the Missal to promote an expression of prayer that is inclusive and understood by all people.*
2. *Implement a revision of the Lectionary that is accessible and considers inclusive language alongside accuracy.*
3. *Implement a collaborative model of ordained and lay sacramental ministry which draws forth the gifts of all the baptised.*
  - a. Implement the commissioning of capable and suitably trained lay people to specific ministries within the Church’s sacramental life. This would include Baptism, preaching on the Gospel, blessing and witnessing marriages on behalf of the Church and officiating at funerals.
4. *Develop further liturgical and prayerful events which are not dependent on clergy.*
  - a. Commission and call appropriately trained lay people to lead Liturgies of the Word with or without the distribution of Holy Communion.
  - b. Provide formal approval and encouragement for suitably qualified lay women and men to break open the Word within the community, supporting parishioners to share reflections on the Word out of their experience.

- c. Encourage liturgical events in response to communal matters of special significance (bushfires, floods, droughts, war, grief, pandemic).

## **Formation**

**Prioritised question: How do we walk together as a pilgrim Church that effectively accompanies, ministers to and forms people, in light of secular and religious practice, as a community of Christ’s disciples?**

God’s people seek access to faith formation which helps us open ourselves to God. A smaller proportion of society is engaged with the sacramental life of the church, so how can we respond with formation that is sensitive to people’s needs? Clergy and laity need to be formed together, so how can what we share help us respond to the movement of God’s Spirit amongst us? God’s people repeatedly spoke of their desire for ‘good liturgy’, so how do we best form our priests and liturgical ministers? Amidst increasing ‘noise’ and busyness, how do we pray and discern? As Catholic families and schools continue to face challenges commending faith to our young people, what should we do as Church?

### **Proposals for change**

1. *Renew the sacramental life of the Church to facilitate the participation and formation of God’s people across life’s transitions.*
  - a. Implement national stage- and age-related steps for full inclusion in the community through the Sacraments of Initiation that recognise the understanding required for these sacraments. Begin by surveying dioceses across the country to investigate why different ages were chosen previously.

- b. Recommend that sacramental preparation of children be led by qualified educators working with the parents and the children.
- c. Equip small local communities within a parish to educate and assist parents through the sacramental processes being undertaken by their children.
- d. Encourage local Church communities to develop new liturgical and prayerful experiences that meet transition moments in peoples' lives.

2. *Proactively teach people to pray in our modern world.*

- a. Call on the ACBC to fund and develop a national "ways to pray" online hub, app and social media page for all Catholics that shares information about ways to pray personally and communally. This would connect to the liturgical life of the Church and highlight different customs, charisms, opportunities for retreats and spiritual direction, as well as providing specific input for different interest groups such as families, educators, seniors and young people.
- b. Call on bishops, dioceses, parishes, religious congregations, retreat centres, theological institutes and communities of the lay faithful to develop and share Australian, theologically-sound educational resources on prayer. These could be easily accessible (podcasts/ YouTube videos) and would support learning on how to pray within the living tradition of the Church, including recordings of prayer forms such as the Liturgy of the Hours, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, Lectio Divina, scriptural Rosary

and Spiritual Exercises, with suitable prayer guides offering these prayers in context.

- c. Encourage dioceses to prepare programs to form God's people in prayer and discernment.

3. *Invest in ongoing national and local formation opportunities for the people of God.*

- a. Expand the reach of spiritual formation for liturgical ministers, musicians and educators who lead prayer and worship.
- b. Build, staff and promote discernment houses as 'hubs' for younger people within the Church's life.
- c. Equip ministries of faith and service to link with Catholic schools and teachers in order to find new channels of communication and ministry for and with alumni.
- d. Explore a national approach to marriage formation.
- e. Train liturgical musicians through sponsorships and scholarships within local dioceses.

4. *Improve how we form and equip clergy as shepherds of the people of God.*

- a. Consider how the formation of priests accompanies that of the laity.
- b. Ensure priestly formation is comprehensive, ongoing and reviewed regularly across the lifespan, including ongoing liturgical formation to assist priests in their service as leaders of liturgical prayer.
- c. Ensure seminarians have the best possible training for ministry, including substantial formation as leaders of liturgical prayer.



## Mission

### Prioritised question: How can our practice of being prayerful and Eucharistic draw us and others to Christ?

“Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life” (*The Roman Missal, Order of Mass*, 144). The Eucharist, as food for the journey, equips us to return to this mission in daily life (*Ad Gentes*, 15, 36). After hearing the Gospel proclaimed, do we live out a better love of neighbour? On sharing Jesus’ peace at the Eucharist, do we reconcile with rivals, love the poor and care for creation? How can we encourage the evangelical witness of our lived relationship with God? How will we engage people currently disillusioned or isolated from our Church community?

#### Proposals for change

1. *Encourage greater links between Eucharist and mission in the community.*
  - a. Review the Dismissal Rite to consider an expanded and more frequently used prayer or solemn blessing over the people. This could equip priests and laity alike to more purposefully live out our calling as a Eucharistic community on mission in daily life.
  - b. Encourage members of our Church communities to discern commitments to concrete ministries of service, justice and ecology.

2. *Implement pastoral strategies to engage with disillusioned, drifting, wounded and isolated members of our community.*

- a. Empower the National Centre for Pastoral Research to convene a team of pastoral theologians to survey the spiritual needs of people who are disillusioned, drifting, wounded and isolated from our community.
- b. Equip diocesan pastoral renewal teams, parish communities and retreat houses with the resources needed to respond to the findings of such a survey in targeted, public ways, facilitating communal conversations which meet people’s needs.
- c. Find new online and in-person ways to inform people’s consciences on important Church teachings in a clear, thorough and accessible way.

## Conclusion

As a movement of the Holy Spirit, the Plenary Council is a profound grace for us as the Church in Australia. The Council is an opportunity to open ourselves to actions which will respond to the needs of God’s people today. With this document, we ask for God’s grace to carry on the work of Christ under the guidance of the Spirit (*Gaudium et Spes*, 3). We ask for the grace to be a Christ-centred Church that is prayerful and Eucharistic, a Church which can tell “what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:35).

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### Image

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