



FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

FORMATION AND LEADERSHIP FOR MISSION AND MINISTRY

1. Pope Francis has observed that “what we are experiencing is *not simply an epoch of changes, but an epochal change* . . . It entails decisions that rapidly transform our ways of living, of relating to one another, of communicating and thinking, of how different generations relate to one another and how we understand and experience faith and science.” (Francis, “Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia,” 21 December 2019). This context calls for a re-assessment of the Church’s models of formation for leadership at all levels to ensure that they address the needs of the People of God, promote the mission of evangelisation, and strengthen the witness of all the baptised through personal and communal conversion.
2. Throughout the dialogue and discernment of the Plenary Council, many recognised the need for appropriate formation and support to assist lay people in discerning and using their gifts wisely. The small group responses from the First General Assembly identified the need for a variety of formation opportunities for members of the Church from leaders of Catholic entities to parish family groups, from isolated parishes in the outback to Archdiocesan chanceries and for people in formal and informal roles. The formation and leadership of clergy was also identified as critical to the growth of dioceses and parishes and to future efforts at evangelisation in the wider community. The call for concrete action to address improvements in governance and leadership and formation for a wider range of ministries consistently emerged as an important priority of this Council’s deliberations.
3. The contexts, resources and challenges of parish life and ministry vary markedly across this vast land. Therefore, formation as a deepening of our knowledge of God and our discipleship of Christ needs to be adapted to the local circumstances. Such formation requires creative multi-dimensional, integrated and experiential models and methods, which acknowledge the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Church and support the Catholic identity, vocation and mission of families, faith communities, schools, institutions and agencies. The present moment is complex and requires a fundamental renewal of our missionary energies as well as the scope and style of resources needed to respond to what God is asking of us at this time.

4. Pastoral leadership requires being attentive to the voice of the Spirit within the Church and beyond, and must cultivate commitment, mutuality, and synodality within the whole ecclesial community. While encouraging and nurturing the gifts of others, the call to Christian leadership necessarily requires fidelity to the Gospel and a continual growth and renewal of our closeness to Jesus Christ. Through their living witness to the great virtues of faith, hope and love, and their proclamation of the Word, Christian leaders encourage the ecclesial community in the way of ongoing conversion which, in turn, supports and furthers missionary discipleship. Through appropriate and fruitful ecclesial formation, each of the baptised comes to realise their missionary identity. Each member of the faithful is, indeed, a mission, called to bring fullness of life, blessing and healing to all people (Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, n. 273). As all the baptised are called to be missionary disciples, all should be equipped and supported through regular opportunities and programs for ministerial and missionary formation. To give flesh and bones to God's love in contemporary Australia, such formation should incorporate grounding in scripture and tradition, liturgy, proclamation of the kerygma of the Risen Christ, the teaching of the Church about the God-given dignity of life, Catholic Social Teaching, and formation in practices of synodality, interculturality, ecumenical dialogue, and interfaith relations.

5. Much work has already been undertaken in the area of formation, including the publication by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference of *Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* and *Guidelines for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* (2016), a national resource for Lay Pastoral Ministers, *Faithful Stewards of God's Grace*, (2018), and *Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry* (2014). New national guidelines for seminary formation have also been approved by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and are in the final stages of being confirmed by the Holy See. The National Catholic Safeguarding Standards also require the development and implementation of policies for the ongoing formation of clergy, including professional/pastoral supervision, and there are opportunities to extend this into broader requirements for the professional development of lay leaders and ordained ministers. Many diocesan and eparchial agencies, ministerial public juridic persons, and tertiary institutions offer programs and courses for the formation of lay leaders, and those preparing for or engaged in ordained ministry. Therefore, multiple resources can be drawn upon and integrated into new strategies which respond to the call of this Council.

6. A renewed focus for formation will prioritise formation of the domestic Church by encouraging and accompanying parents, guardians, and caregivers in their vocation as "the primary and principal" teachers of faith and recognising the crucial role of families as the "school" of Christian formation (Vatican II, Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 28 October 1965, n. 3). The Plenary Council recognises that formation for married life and parenting, arising from the baptismal vocation, requires an intentional and ongoing ministry of peer support, spiritual and sacramental accompaniment, and discerning reflection on and support for the challenges of each phase of married and family life. Formation for families requires new and creative strategies that correspond to the rhythms of family life and provide accompaniment at all stages of their journey.

7. Responding to the call for a renewal of formation, the Plenary Council endorses principles and strategies that develop models of formation to encourage and strengthen the apostolate of the laity in the world. This apostolate offers a particular prophetic sign by

seeking the common good and by concrete actions that protect and promote human dignity, peace and justice. Attentive to the 'signs of the times', movements of the lay apostolate, in their various forms, offer the baptised a way to reflect on the concrete experiences of their lives in the light of the Gospel and engage as missionary disciples in the world. As a means for formation, the apostolate of the laity is grounded in scriptural reflection, reception of the ecclesial wisdom of our tradition, and prayerful communal discernment. This formation shapes Christian engagement with the broader Australian community through listening and dialogue, and supports actions for the transformation of society through daily commitment and public witness.

8. In addressing these concerns for formation, it is important to consider and provide for both the needs of communities in this present time and the needs of the next generation. Particular attention is required to attend to the formation needs of regional and rural communities. Formation in faith and new forms of missionary discipleship lie at the heart of this Council's work of planning for the future.

9. **THEREFORE**, to meet the formation needs of the present and future, the Plenary Council commits the Church in Australia to developing and committing to a culture of life-long faith formation that will ensure:

- a. the diversity of the Catholic community is explicitly recognised;
- b. intercultural competency is encouraged, especially in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and spiritualities;
- c. the equal dignity of women and men is affirmed and demonstrated;
- d. the renewal of faith formation within and for families in the context of the critical role that marriage, parenting, and care-giving plays as a school of formation, is prioritised and strengthened;
- e. the apostolate of the laity, along with new ecclesial realities, acting as "leaven in the world," (Lumen Gentium n. 31) is promoted, encouraged and supported;
- f. the hopes, spirituality, giftedness, energy, and modes of communication and connection of young people are identified, incorporated, encouraged and celebrated;
- g. ongoing support and strategies for those who minister to young people;
- h. the rich variety of spiritual and devotional traditions of the Church are appreciated and celebrated; and
- i. synodal practices such as encounter, accompaniment, listening, dialogue, discernment, and collaboration are fostered and deepened.

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DECREE

The Fifth Plenary Council decrees:

Article 1

That each diocese and eparchy develop or strengthen strategic policies grounded in fidelity to the Gospel and closeness to Jesus Christ, to identify and support ministry and leadership formation. These will:

- a. acknowledge the generational, cultural and ethnic diversity of the contemporary Church in Australia;
- b. recognise the changing community profile of many parish and faith communities, incorporating an awareness of and outreach to those beyond these communities;
- c. enhance knowledge and skills for participating in local churches' structures and processes for consultation, dialogue and decision-making;
- d. address the particular needs of clergy, with focuses on initial formation and selection processes, and ongoing support and formation;
- e. include strategies for initiation, ongoing formation and appropriate forms of mentoring and accompaniment (human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral) that foster collaboration and are grounded in adult education principles;
- f. provide ongoing support and strategies for those who minister to young people;
- g. support opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics to undertake formation and training, ensuring that local circumstances and social data are taken into account; and
- h. consider avenues for financial support through scholarships, sponsorships and grants.

Article 2

That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference commission the Australian Catholic Biblical Association and the Australian Catholic Theological Association to liaise with appropriate Catholic and diocesan agencies, institutions and educational providers in order to enhance cross-institutional engagement and development of resources and formation programs. The design of these resources and programs will carefully consider the needs of rural, remote, and regional areas and creatively assess the use of available technology in order to improve delivery and accessibility.

Article 3

That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference establish a working group with expertise in formation to develop national Formation for Leadership strategies and guidelines designed for clergy, religious and lay leaders to address the possibilities and challenges of synodal

leadership in parishes and diocesan and eparchial agencies and support the Church's work of evangelisation. These strategies and guidelines will:

- a. have a national scope and be adaptable to local circumstances;
- b. aim to enhance competencies in leadership and commitment to synodal practices, with a focus on building communities that are welcoming to all, with particular attention to those on the margins of society and the Church;
- c. identify and promote models of effective engagement with government and civil society;
- d. ensure leaders are formed in scripture, tradition and ecclesiology; and
- e. foster a spirituality of leadership through personal and communal prayer, connection to the sacramental life of the church, and commitment to service

Article 4

That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference establish a working group with expertise in Catholic Social Teaching to develop a national framework for formation in Catholic Social Teaching that will encourage, support and expand the offering of programs in Catholic Social Teaching. Situated within the broader teaching and mission of the Church, this framework will emphasise the social dimension of the Church's mission, incorporating contemporary analysis of the Australian context, with a particular focus on the formation requirements of leaders in Catholic social service, health and aged care organisations, Catholic education and dioceses.

The Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia will interpret the decrees of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia in accordance with the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches and the traditions of each church sui iuris.

In accordance with canon 446 of the Code of Canon Law, this decree is not to be promulgated until it has been reviewed by the Apostolic See. It will be promulgated in *Australasian Catholic Record* and the website of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in accordance with its usual practice. The decrees will oblige six months after promulgation.

Signed:

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB
President

Bishop Shane Mackinlay
Vice-President

Date: