

# Towards a Synodal Church

A Submission to Plenary Council 2020  
from St Kevin's Parish, Lower Templestowe  
6 March 2019

We, the people of St. Kevin's parish in Templestowe, Victoria, welcome the decision of the Australian Bishops to establish a Plenary Council 2020. We also welcome the statement by Archbishop Mark Coleridge, Chair of the Australian Bishops Conference, that the Plenary Council is 'a gathering of the whole Church to make decisions, together and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, concerning the future of the Church in Australia' (1).

It is important that the Council is truly inclusive, that it works cooperatively and that it takes decisions on key issues facing the Australian Church. The Catholic Church remains, in our view, a powerful force for good in Australian society. But a Council is sorely needed now, in the wake of the evil of clerical sexual abuse and the scourge of clericalism, and at a time when the official Church has become alienated from both ordinary Catholics and from Australian society as a whole.

This is further reinforced with the events of the guilty verdict for Cardinal Pell and the extensive coverage of the matter in all Australian newspapers, radio and television stations, as well as international media. It is now even more imperative for the Plenary Council to genuinely consider all submissions, and to listen and heed the mood of the Catholic Community across Australia. Not to do so will further diminish the trust of Catholics in the Church hierarchy, already at an all-time low.

This brief submission starts with our view of the context in which the Council is taking place. It makes some suggestions about how the Council can be truly inclusive, and then highlights six key issues that we believe the Council must address. Seven attachments provide further support to this submission.

## 1. The Context of the Plenary Council

*Completing and extending Vatican II.* The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II; 1962-65) began a major process of *aggiornamento* in the Church, proposing changes in its practices, processes and theological positions to promote renewal in the light of emerging realities at that time. The completion of these processes, after several decades of roll-back, is a major task, to which the Plenary Council must contribute. Pope Francis and others have said that it takes 100 years to fully implement the results of a Council, and that we are now about half-way through that task.

However, in the 55 years since Vatican II, our world has continued to change rapidly, often in ways of profound moral significance, but not anticipated by Vatican II. In most areas of society, the right of women to full and equal participation in human life has now been recognised. The fact that human beings have, by nature, diverse forms of sexual orientation has also been accepted, so that all should be treated equally. Since Vatican II, globalisation has rapidly gathered pace, and we have seen the revelation of the extent of sexual abuse in the Church. None of these issues were seriously considered by Vatican II, but all must be addressed now.

Vatican II stressed the role of the laity in Christ's work and saw the Church as the whole People of God, but left the work of renewal to the bishops, emphasising *episcopal collegiality*. This has clearly

failed, as has been recognised by Pope Francis. This has led him to emphasise synodality: “It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium” (2).

*Building a synodal Church.* To implement the reforms of Vatican II, and to extend them to meet new realities, Pope Francis has called for the building of a truly synodal Church. Synodality is the process whereby the whole People of God – laity, priests and bishops, people from all walks of life – move forward together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (3,4). As we understand it, synodality is not about challenging the authority of the bishops, but about insisting that that authority be exercised in a quite different way, one in which decisions emerge from a mutual process of listening and discernment involving, in a genuinely inclusive way, representatives of the whole Church.

This theme of building a truly inclusive, synodal Church is the guiding theme of our submission and should, we believe, be the guiding theme of the Council.

## **2. The Nature of the Plenary Council**

To be a real vehicle for healing and change, the Council must be open to the whole Church and not be tightly controlled by the Bishops. It must reflect the emergence of a new culture in the Church, free of the clericalism which has created so much damage. We suggest that the key principles of a synodal approach to the Council should be as follows:

- A majority of delegates should be a diverse group of lay men and women and priests, selected from local churches in a transparent manner.
- All delegates should have a role in setting the agenda, and on all matters there should be equal voting across all delegates to determine the sense of the faithful.
- The Bishops should retain the responsibility of determining the official decisions of the Council, using their deliberative vote, but in open voting and in the light of the sense of the faithful.

This last point does not mean that episcopal control of all major decisions should continue unhindered. On the contrary, in a synodal Church, the Bishops must exercise their authority having clear regard for the sense of the faithful assembled in Council, differing from that view only for strong reasons clearly expressed.

The Council is being established under Can. 443 of Canon Law. We submit that an appropriate application of Clause 6 of Can. 443<sup>1</sup> would provide sufficient flexibility to allow these principles to be applied. In the present situation in which the Church finds itself in Australia, it would surely be consistent with this clause for the Bishop’s Conference to invite a substantial number of women, both lay and religious, to participate in the Council, and also an increased number of lay men and of priests working for the Church at the coal-face. It is also within the gift of the Bishops to set up a transparent selection process and a genuinely synodal process for setting and managing the agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> “§6. Others can also be invited as guests to particular councils, if it is expedient in the judgment of the conference of bishops for a plenary council.” (5)

Such actions are both within the authority of the Bishops and vital if the Council is to be a beacon of hope for the Church in Australia. Failing such actions, the Council will be seen as a meeting of the episcopal club, reinforcing the current cynicism widespread among laity and priests. We also urge the Bishops to emulate Pope Francis' efforts to decentralise authority in the Church, encouraging the Council to take decisions for the Australian Church without continual reference to Rome.

### 3. Renewal towards a Synodal Church

We propose four areas for consideration, to make a reality of all the People of God walking forward together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

#### *An Open and Inclusive Church*

Genuine openness and inclusiveness must be a key mark of a synodal Church. This will involve being open to new ideas from everyone irrespective of their sexual preferences, marital status, disability or mental health or current lack of trust and faith in the Church. But we must not only be open to these individuals and ideas, but also truly inclusive of them in the life of our communities.

Being an open church is about attitude, having an open mind to accept change, not as a betrayal of past learnings but as necessary to deal with current realities, accepting that Church teaching can develop in response to new contexts. In order to be an open church, we need to accept that we can learn from others. Our lack of openness, as a Church, can be interpreted as an attitude of self-righteousness. Such an attitude is inappropriate in the current era, Pope Francis makes clear:

*In her ongoing discernment, the Church can also come to see that certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the Gospel, even some that have deep historical roots, are no longer properly understood and appreciated. Some of these customs may be beautiful, but they no longer serve as means of communicating the Gospel. We should not be afraid to re-examine them. At the same time, the Church has rules or precepts which may have been quite effective in their time, but no longer have the same usefulness for directing and shaping people's lives. Saint Thomas Aquinas pointed out that the precepts which Christ and the apostles gave to the people of God 'are very few'. (Evangelii Gaudium #43)*

This requires us to be generally open to, for example, our Indigenous brothers and sisters, and to people of other faiths or of no faith. From each of these, we have much to learn, and must avoid being self-righteous about our knowledge of the truth.

We cannot, however, be genuinely open to people and ideas without being truly inclusive of different groups in the life of our communities. An inclusive Church lives by the words of St. Paul's letter to the Galatians:

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27, 28)*

This Church should make no distinctions nor discriminate on any level, on grounds of economic power, gender, mental health, physical ability, race or sexuality. But this is far from the case today.

While there are many who can be affected by the lack of openness and inclusivity in the Church today, three groups bear special mention. Women are systematically excluded from full participation in the liturgy and governance of the Church, on the basis of past custom rather than any current

good reason. The gay and gender dysphoric communities, the LGBTQI, are judged as 'objectively wrong' in official teaching, and are made unwelcome by the Church hierarchy and by many lay Catholics. Those who are divorced and remarried are also excluded from full participation in the Church, and often feel a great weight of rejection.

In today's world, many sincere Catholics take issue with particular customs, rules and precepts of the Church, some of which have little direct foundations in teaching of Jesus. Denying access to the life and sacraments of the Church should not be used as a way of enforcing these rules and precepts in a changing world. Rather the Church should be open and inclusive to all believers of good faith and the Plenary Council should take a lead in encouraging such an approach.

### ***Beyond Clericalism: Reshaping the Priesthood***

There is a widespread sense, both in Australia and internationally, that current patterns of priesthood are failing the People of God. This is so in spite of the remarkable commitment of many fine priests and lay people to building and maintaining vibrant Christian communities.

Two issues are critical here. The first is the way clerical priesthood is often practised within the Church, as an exclusive club – male, hierarchical and celibate – that is closed and secretive, part of a system of privilege, deference and power. Especially in the wake of the sexual abuse crisis around the world, the evils of clericalism have been denounced by many, led by Pope Francis (6). The nature of the priesthood needs to be changed, away from the clerical club to more diverse and humble roles of service to local communities. This will also involve rediscovering the reality of the priesthood of the baptised. As the fathers of Vatican II said in *Lumen Gentium* "the baptised, by regeneration and anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood".

The second issue is composition of the modern ordained priesthood. In Australia as elsewhere, there has been a heavy loss of priests and few young men have come forward, yet women and, in many jurisdictions, married men are excluded from the ordained priesthood. In our view there are no good reasons, in current times, for excluding either women or married men, and we have no doubt that in due course both groups will be ordained within the Catholic Church. But it must be noted that just broadening the base of a still clerical priesthood will achieve little. This change will only be effective in the context of a fundamental reshaping of the ordained priesthood.

The Plenary Council should endorse the importance of the priesthood of the baptised, and the need to reinforce this role to overcome the problems of clericalism arising from a dominant focus on the priesthood of the ordained. Some suggestions for implementing this rebalancing follow:

- set up a Commission, with a lay chair and majority lay membership, to make suggestions about how to strengthen the priesthood of the baptised;
- direct parishes to give more recognition and authority to lay ministries;
- strengthen the role of parish councils and make them more synodal, with all members working cooperatively with the priest rather than as only consultative; and
- transform the education of priests, for example by abolishing seminaries and developing formation programs better integrated into the life of the Church and of broader society, and provide similar programs to prepare bishops-elect before they take on this role.

On the question of the composition of the ordained priesthood, the Plenary Council should:

- endorse the principle that all persons – male or female, single or married – should be eligible to become priests, and transmit this view to the Pope;
- curtail the practice of bringing priests from overseas to offset the shortage of local priests;
- immediately implement a *virī probati* program for the ordination of married men and for the re-admission of men who have left the priesthood to marry; and
- begin a process for the ordination of women as deacons.

### *Governance for a Synodal Church*

To become an open and inclusive Church, a synodal Church, with a reshaped ministry of priesthood, we need a new model of governance; for the current male, clerical, celibate, hierarchical governance model has clearly been found to be wanting.

We need a return to the way of ‘being Church’ present from the very beginnings of the Christian community, where the lay people played an active role in all of Church life, “including the election of bishops and the designation of ministers” (6). This ‘way of being Church’ is in line with the movement towards synodality or ‘walking together’ being explored by theologians and encouraged by Pope Francis.

A practical first step on the part of the ordained clergy and Church hierarchy in Australia in regard to the leadership of parishes and dioceses, would be the adoption and implementation of the principles of the Governance Institute of Australia (GIA). According to the GIA, the four key components of Governance are transparency, accountability, stewardship and integrity. Other practical steps could include the introduction of greater flexibility and variety for those men or women seeking to be ordained, including optional celibacy for priests and limited tenure for bishops.

And more than these practical measures, we need real conversion of heart, renewed understanding of the shared sense of faith of all the baptised, a renewed will and ability on the part of the Bishops to listen to the faithful, especially those whose words are not comforting. We need a willingness on the part of all the lay members of the Church community to speak the truth in faith to those in authority and with respect for the dignity of all. We need a willingness on the part of all to enter into genuine dialogue, and trust that the Holy Spirit is renewing our community for this time.

### *Liturgy for a Synodal Church*

The liturgy is the central way in which the People of God meet together and experience the Lord. In spite of the major improvements flowing from Vatican II, many aspects of our liturgical practice still remain as ‘customs ... that no longer serves as means of communicating the Gospel’. The Plenary Council should take further steps to modernise the liturgy to serve a synodal Church, making use of the new flexibility offered by Pope Francis to craft genuinely Australian solutions to Australian issues.

*Language.* The current literal translation of the Missal has failed badly, and our liturgical language is not inclusive. We believe that the Vatican II goal of ‘full, active participation in the liturgy’ will not be achieved until our language matches the lived experience of our people. The Council could, for

example, introduce the 1998 translation of the Missal, vetoed by the Vatican in 2001, for Australian use. Better still, it could establish a Commission of Australian experts, of which there are many, to create translations appropriate for Australian use.

*The Sacraments.* The practices surrounding many of the sacraments needs to be updated. It is critical that the Third Rite of Reconciliation be reinstated – the people have voted with their feet and moved away from this sacrament as currently practised. It is also, in our view, inappropriate to have young children involved in the Sacrament of Penance. Many simple changes could also be made to enhance the value of Confirmation and Anointing of the Sick to those who receive them.

*Educating the Laity for a Greater Role.* There are many good pastoral reasons why the laity can play a beneficial role in the delivery of some sacraments. This should be facilitated and appropriate training.

#### **4. ‘The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor’**

As Vatican II and Pope Francis have stressed, the Church must not only reform its internal processes but look outward to the needs of the world in a more vigorous fashion. Francis has especially highlighted ‘the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor’, stressing that they are interrelated. The destruction of the Earth impacts most heavily on the poor, both within and across countries. The poor live with poor housing on marginal land, in worse environmental conditions. Thus they bear the greatest impact of climate change, without the resources to protect themselves from its ravages.

In spite of the landmark Social Justice Statement, *A New Earth: An Environmental Challenge*, released by the Bishops in 2002, and the work of organisations such as Catholic Earthcare Australia, established in the wake of that statement, the performance of the Australian Church has been very poor on environmental and climate change issues. Indeed, given the activities of some bishops and prominent lay Catholics, many see the Catholic Church on the side of the climate change deniers. This is in stark contrast to the position laid out in Pope Francis’ magnificent encyclical *Laudato Si’*, which embodies an appeal to all humanity to urgently address the man-made crisis facing Sister Earth, tying this directly to the needs of the poor.

By contrast, the Australian Church has had a strongly commitment to the poor from the earliest days, from the establishment of the St Vincent de Paul Society in 1854 and of Caritas Australia in 1964, to the heavy investment, for over a century, in providing education, health and other services to meet the needs of the poor and marginalised. This commitment is evident in the release by the Bishops of a Social Justice Statement for every year since 1940.

We submit that Plenary Council 2020 should take major new initiatives on climate change and the environment, where we have been weak, but also reinvigorate the Church’s activities on social justice to meet the growing challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

#### ***The Cry of the Earth***

We share, with many around the world, deep concern about the degradation of the natural environment and the massive challenges to future generations posed by global warming. In many countries, including Australia, the land and the rivers are seriously polluted, water is in short supply, many species of plants and animals are becoming extinct, extreme events such as cyclones, floods

and droughts are becoming more frequent and the both the atmosphere and the oceans are warming. These trends severely threaten the quality of life of future generations, and hence are rightly of special concern to young people.

Following Pope Francis' lead, Plenary Council 2020 should make protecting the environment and mitigating climate change a central duty of Australian Catholics. Actions to this end might include:

- (i) Speaking out consistently, from all levels of the Church community, emphasising:
  - the need for a moral conversion, to attitudes much more respectful of the natural world and ways of living more in harmony with it;
  - link this conversion explicitly with the message of Australia's indigenous peoples; and
  - advocating strongly for real policy changes to address global warming;
- (ii) Establish new institutions to drive this central mandate of the Church's mission;
- (iii) Support local initiatives to preserve the natural environment and to reduce emissions; and
- (iv) Follow the example of other Churches, such as that in the Philippines, in giving high priority to activities to study and implement *Laudato Si'*.

### *The Cry of the Poor*

In a globalised world there are close links between the marginalised and dispossessed in Africa, Asia and the Middle East and the disadvantaged in Australia. As a free, open and peaceful society, Australia remains a magnet for those seeking to escape from poverty and oppression. At the same time our domestic challenges – for example of homelessness, children and families in poverty, mental health and domestic violence – remain serious, and can be exacerbated by the flow of new entrants. How to deal with these complex issues going forward is a major challenge for all Australian governments. With the mission given to it by Jesus and reinforced by Pope Francis, the Australian Church should be a powerful force, in both moral and practical terms, in shaping our national and local response.

In our view Plenary Council 2020 should both celebrate what the Church has achieved in working for the poor and marginalised for over 150 years, and seek to give new impetus to revitalise and expand that work. It is beyond our competence to suggest here how that might best be done. But it should at least involve stronger advocacy for the 'priority to the poor' in Australian life and government policy and intensification of 'on the ground' activities in the areas mentioned above.

## References

- (1) Archbishop Mark Coleridge, <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/pages/about-us/>
- (2) Pope Francis, 17 October 2015, Address on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html)
- (3) Faggioli, Massimo, 'From collegiality to synodality', La Croix International, 28 November 2018
- (4) International Theological Commission, 2018, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church", [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodality\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodality_en.html)
- (5) Code of Canon Law, 443, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_INDEX.HTM)
- (6) Brother Emile of Taizé: Faithful to the Future: Listening to Yves Congar, London: Bloomsbury, 2013 p 109



## A Synodal Structure for the Plenary Council

Attachment 1 to the Submission to Plenary Council 2020  
from St Kevin's Parish, Lower Templestowe  
6 March 2019

### Key issues

The Plenary Council 2020 has been called at the time of real crisis in the Australian Church, in the wake of growing disillusionment over several decades, culminating in the sexual abuse crisis. This alienation is particularly marked on the part of young men and women, and is driven by distaste of clericalism and of the remoteness of the Church hierarchy.

Many Catholics welcome Plenary Council 2020 as an opportunity for real change, in the spirit of Vatican II and under the leadership of Pope Francis. But it must be said that the prevailing mood is one of cynicism: 'for all the words nothing will really change', especially given that the Bishops will provide two thirds of the attendees and only they will have a deliberative vote. It will be a tragedy for the Australian Church if the cynical view proves correct, for the alienation of people from the Church will deepen further.

In his letter to the church in Chile in January 2018, Pope Francis said

"The People of God does not have first, second or third-class Christians. Their participation is not a question of goodwill, concessions, rather it is constitutive of the nature of the Church."(1)

This is not the reality of the Church in Australia in 2018. Women make a massive contribution to the life of the Church – in parishes, schools, social welfare and so on – but remain third-class citizens. Not only are they excluded from all formal roles within the ministry, but they are rarely consulted on issues that relate directly to them and their families. Nor are men much better placed. For example, major decisions are made, such as how to respond to the continuing decline in vocations to the priesthood, without any involvement with the laity or indeed with the current priests within the parishes.

Plenary Council 2020 offers an opportunity for the whole People of God to walk together in unity, with a profound sense of shared listening and give-and-take, jointly addressing the many problems now facing the Australian Church. A key challenge is to devise and implement arrangements for the Council which will support a shared process of listening, discernment and decision making, broadly consistent with the current provisions of Canon Law. We entirely endorse the view recently expressed by Fr Frank Brennan:

"In twenty-first century Australia, there is no point convening a time consuming and expensive assembly of the Church which includes so few lay women and people from the pews. In the wake of the royal commission, the Catholic faithful are as adamant as the general public that there be transparency and inclusiveness in our church governance arrangements." (2)

## Background and importance of the issues

In our view, the key concept here is that of synodality, the process whereby the whole People of God – laity, priests and bishops, at all levels – walk forward together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As we understand it, synodality is not about challenging the authority of the bishops but about insisting that it be exercised in a quite different way, in which decisions emerge from a mutual process of listening and discernment involving representatives of the whole Church. As a major quasi-official document on synodality, endorsed by Pope Francis, put it: decisions are made by the whole Church, meeting together, but taken on that basis by the bishops, under the authority that they derive from the body of the baptised (3). As Francis has also said (4):

“It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”

The proposed arrangements for Plenary Council 2020 follow the provisions of Canon Law (Can. 443; 5), in a literal and unimaginative way. These provide that the attendees at a Plenary Council include bishops (§1 and §2), holders of other official religious positions, such as vicars general or heads of religious orders (§3), priests and lay people (§4), and others invited ‘if it is expedient in the judgement’ of the Bishops (§6). Priests and lay people are restricted to no more than half the number of Bishops and other religious officials, and only the Bishops have a deliberative vote to make the decisions of the Council.

These arrangements reflect a much older model and are totally inappropriate now. They rightly give rise to the cynicism which is widespread. The Plenary Council needs to be a forerunner of much fuller participation of all of the baptised faithful in the life of the Church. We suggest that better arrangements can be put in place for 2020, still broadly consistent the Canon Law 443.

## Proposals

To be a real vehicle for healing and change, the Council must be open to the whole Church and not tightly controlled by the Bishops. It must reflect the emergence of a new culture in the Church, free of the clericalism which has created so much damage. There are several proposals about how this might be achieved (e.g. 6). We suggest that the key principles of a synodal approach to the Council should be as follows:

- A majority of delegates should be lay people and priests, particularly women, selected from local churches in an open and transparent manner.
- All delegates should have a role in setting the agenda, and on all matters there should be equal voting across all delegates, to determine the sense of the faithful about the issues at hand.
- The Bishops should retain the right to determine which decisions go forward as official decisions of the Council, using their deliberative vote, but they should do so in open voting and in the light of the sense of the Council.

Some have suggested that a dispensation from or an amendment to Can. 443 would be necessary to implement such arrangements (2). We submit that an appropriate application of §6 in the current circumstances should be sufficient. That clause is as follows:

“§6. Others can also be invited as guests to particular councils, if it is expedient in the judgment of the conference of bishops for a plenary council.” (5)

In the present situation in which the Church finds itself in Australia, it would surely be consistent with this clause for the Bishop’s Conference to invite a substantial number of women, both lay and religious, to participate in the Council, and also an increased number of lay men and of priests working for the Church at the coal-face. It is also within the gift of the Bishops to set up a transparent selection process and a genuinely synodal process for setting the agenda and managing the Council.

In our view such actions are not only within the authority of the Bishops but are vital if the Council is to be a new beacon of hope for the Church in Australia. Failing such actions the Council will be seen as a meeting of the episcopal club, reinforcing the current cynicism widespread among laity and priests.

## References

- (1) Pope Francis, Letter to the Church in Chile, 31 May 2017, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-of-pope-francis-letter-to-the-church-in-chile-35580>
- (2) Brennan, Frank (2018), ‘Seeking a plenary council fit for purpose’, Eureka St, 20 November 2018
- (3) International Theological Commission, 2018, ‘Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church’, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_synodalita\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_synodalita_en.html)
- (4) Pope Francis, 17 October 2015, Address on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html)
- (5) Code of Canon Law, 443, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_INDEX.HTM)
- (6) Catholics for Renewal Editorial, November 2018, <https://www.catholicsforrenewal.org/editorial-november-2018>

# An Open and Inclusive Church

Attachment 2 to the Submission to Plenary Council 2020  
from St Kevin's Parish, Lower Templestowe  
6 March 2019

## **Introduction**

St Kevin's Parish is committed to making a meaningful contribution to the Plenary Council to be held in 2020 and has, with the full support of our Parish Priest, Father Gerry McKernan, engaged in an extensive consultation with the Church community. This has resulted in the determination of the critical issues that it believes are paramount to the success and future role of the Catholic Church in Australia and in particular the overwhelming meaningful involvement of the Laity.

This submission has been prepared by a group of volunteers and forms part of an overall response that will be made by the Parish community. The Group believes first and foremost that respect for all people is essential for genuine openness and inclusion. This will involve being open to new ideas from everyone no matter what their sexual preferences, marital status, their disability or mental health and the current lack of trust and faith in the Church. It is hoped that, through this process, those who feel isolated may reignite their faith and contribute to a healthy and relevant Church guided by the people through the Holy Spirit.

## **Open and Inclusive**

In this time of the Church we (the members of the Church community) are being called to a process of deep reflection, "purification and reform" (EG #30). It is our belief that this process must involve a rebuilding of the Church, and result in a Church that is both Open and Inclusive. The challenge is an issue for both the Church in general – the universal Church – as well as each local Church community. Today many people feel marginalised, shut out, rejected or scorned by the Church.

For example, women, the elderly, young people, the abused, LGBTIQ, divorced, disabled, mentally ill, couples using IVF to start or extend their family. In addition, those attending Catholic schools but not attending Sunday Mass, occasional Mass goers, in some places regular Mass participants not involved in ministry.

The reasons are many and varied – from harm caused by the criminal actions of sections of the Catholic clergy, or negligence, of individuals, to disagreements with the Church's teaching, to the lack of a warm welcome offered to a stranger. One example is the ban on the celebration of the 'Third Rite' of Reconciliation which denies the celebration and experience of the mercy of God to the great majority of Catholics.

## ***An Open Church***

Being an open church is about attitude, having an open mind to accept change, as not a betrayal of past learnings but as necessary to deal with current realities, and accepting that Church teaching can develop in response to new contexts. In order to be an open church, we need to accept that we can

learn from others. Our lack of openness, as a Church, can be interpreted as an attitude of *Self-righteousness*. Such an attitude is inappropriate in the current era.

Being an open church is about an attitude by the Bishops Conference, Parish Priest and the wider Church Community towards both those within and outside the Church. Aware of the society and the times we live in, the attitude of openness, like the approach of dialogue proposed by Pope Paul VI in 1964, ***“is demanded by the pluralism of society” and by the maturity, the human community has reached.*** (Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam* (ES) #78)

In an open Church people are not indifferent to, or afraid of, those they encounter or of their questions and doubts. Rather, aware of God’s mercy they seek to draw closer to those they meet in concern and love (ES #63). Such an attitude recognises that all of us are on a journey and that the love of God is “mysteriously at work in each person, above and beyond their faults and failings.” (EG #44)

Being an open Church also involves reaching out to those in need and those who feel excluded for whatever reason, in a spirit of welcome. This means, *“the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God’s face”* (M. Haugen) and all are welcome, and can be part of the community. *“(Nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself ‘the door’: baptism.”* (EG #47). *In an open church, the Eucharist is nourishment for the weak, not a prize for the perfect.* (EG #47)

Specific Examples:

1. Our Indigenous people and their religions and culture.

In spite of the remarkable good most of the early Christian missionaries achieved, it was a one way process. “ we presented the good news of Christianity to the Aborigines and refused to admit that they might have some good news for us that would enrich our spiritual lives”. (Max Charlesworth, *A Democratic Church*, 2008). While we may not engage directly with Aboriginal people at the Parish level, an open attitude needs to be further developed. At the Australian Church level, we need more educated leadership to listen to and learn from our Indigenous people.

2. An open attitude to other religions

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has been concerned to establish a much closer relationship with Judaism, and Church leadership has encouraged greater dialogue with other Religions including Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. Such efforts continue today, in the work of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, and as evidenced by the recent visit of Pope Francis to the United Arab Emirates. However, while much work has been done in building greater ecumenical and interfaith understanding and dialogue, we wonder how much of this has filtered down to the pews. Catholics at all levels need a greater understanding and appreciation of other faiths and indeed, of “ those who have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace.” (Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* #16)

## ***An Inclusive Church***

An inclusive Church lives by the words of St. Paul's letter to the Galatians:

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus, (Galatians 3:27, 28)

This Church makes no distinctions nor discriminates, on any level, on grounds of economic power, gender, mental health, physical ability, race or sexuality. While there are many who can be affected by the lack of openness and inclusivity in the Church today, three groups bear special mention. Women, those who are same sex attracted or gender dysphoric, and those who are divorced. All are affected by elements of theology, teaching or tradition that need to be reviewed, renewed, updated and revised.

Specific Examples:

### 1. Women.

Traditionally, women have been excluded from church roles. As second class citizens they did not share the mystique attributed to their male counterparts, mainly priests and bishops. Yet in 2019 in any given profession they are equal. In Baptism we become People of God, male and female, no difference. Women should be accepted as equal contributors to the life of God's kingdom on earth and just being given the menial tasks is not acceptable.

Often well educated, broadly experienced and with deep faith and wisdom, women are entitled to advisory roles with increased decision making and even sacramental roles. Ordination is the final inclusion. We recognise that this will not occur quickly, but we believe that the principle of women's ordination must be accepted.

### 2. LGBTQI.

Some of the most marginal people for the Catholic communion to accept are the gay community. They are baptised members of the Body of Christ and make a courageous decision to remain, if they do. Many of those who leave, do so because they are no longer welcomed.

As illustrated by the same sex marriage legislation, attitudes have shifted in the community to accept these relationships as fully valid and many Catholics support the position. However, they are not approved in official church teaching but judged as 'objectively wrong'. We believe that this teaching is based on a misunderstanding of the scripture that is claimed to be its base, and needs to be reviewed.

How should we welcome them as people loved by God and as fully active members of our community? Only by saying with Pope Francis "If someone is gay and searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge."

### 3. Divorced and remarried persons.

We are not yet an inclusive church for those who are divorced and remarried but we assume that many have a genuine desire to remain active and participatory members of the faith community. They have been baptised, and by holding this faith, may be looking for nourishment and a sense of belonging to a community, each of whom also struggle on life's journey.

The church should provide the welcome, the encouragement and the space for their relationship with God to flourish. They always belong to God and, we trust, are guided by their conscience. Francis seems to have given a cautious "yes" on the Communion question, with the justifiable "a case by case" condition.

It is time for the Catholic Church in Australia to renew its theology of sexuality and marriage and its practice and teaching concerning these Groups. It is also time to provide the opportunity for **all** (suitably qualified and informed) members of the Community, to participate in leadership and decision-making roles and have the opportunity to contribute to the Church as ordained priests or in other meaningful ROLES, should that be their calling from the Holy Spirit

As Pope Francis has said:

*In her ongoing discernment, the Church can also come to see that certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the Gospel, even some that have deep historical roots, are no longer properly understood and appreciated. Some of these customs may be beautiful, but they no longer serve as means of communicating the Gospel. We should not be afraid to re-examine them. At the same time, the Church has rules or precepts which may have been quite effective in their time, but no longer have the same usefulness for directing and shaping people's lives. Saint Thomas Aquinas pointed out that the precepts which Christ and the apostles gave to the people of God 'are very few'" (EG #43)*

## References

Charlesworth, M. *A Democratic Church*, 2008

Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, (The Joy of the Gospel), 24 November, 2013, Strathfield, NSW, St Paul Publications

Marty Haugen, *ALL ARE WELCOME*, 1994 GIA Publications, Inc.

Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, (The Church), August 6, 1964, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_06081964\\_ecclesiam.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html), accessed 7 December, 2018

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# **Beyond Clericalism: Towards a Humble and Inclusive Priesthood**

Attachment 3 to the Submission to Plenary Council 2020  
from St Kevin's Parish, Lower Templestowe  
6 March 2019

Ministry, in its many forms, is at the heart of the life of the Church. Yet there is a widespread sense, both in Australia and internationally, that current patterns of ministry are failing the People of God. This is so in spite of the remarkable commitment of many fine priests and lay people to building and maintaining vibrant Christian communities.

Two issues are critical here. The first is clericalism: the way in which the priesthood is often practised within the Church, as an exclusive club – male, hierarchical and celibate – that is closed and secretive, part of a system of privilege, deference and power. The evils of clericalism have been denounced by many, especially in the wake of the sexual abuse crisis around the world. These denunciations have been led by Pope Francis, who recently said:

'Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. (1)

As the leaders of the clerical hierarchy become increasingly remote from the views, needs and concerns of the faithful, involvement in the Church has declined, particularly on the part of the young. These practices are far removed from the example given by Jesus when he washed the feet of his disciples, telling them 'I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you'.

The second issue is the exclusion of women, and of men who are not celibate, from the priesthood. In many countries, again particularly Australia, there has been a heavy loss of priests and few young men have come forward to join the priesthood as currently structured. This is taking place at a time of much greater involvement of lay people in non-ordained ministries, and of increased involvement of lay people in theological and related forms of study. Together these trends highlight the continuing exclusion of women and, in many jurisdictions, of married men from the ordained ministry. While many now argue the case for the ordination of women, whether married or single, and of married men in larger numbers, this change will only be effective in the context of a fundamental reshaping of the ministry.

## **Beyond Clericalism: The Nature of the Priesthood**

These issues have deep roots in the history of the Church. In *Lumen Gentium* the fathers of Vatican II note that "the baptised, by regeneration and anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood". They distinguished between this, the priesthood of the baptised, and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood. The emphasis given to these two forms of priesthood has varied throughout the Church's history.

In the early Church the focus was firmly on the priesthood of the whole community, where there was no more Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, or indeed clergy or lay (2). Everyone shared in that priesthood and the Eucharist was celebrated by the person accepted by the local community as its leader. While this gradually changed over time, for most of the first millennium the sense of the diversity of ministries remained and only persons who had been selected as leaders by their local



Church could be ordained (2). The selected leader represented Christ because he was selected by his community to do so, on behalf of the Church.

Towards the end of the first millennium, and especially in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, a fundamental change took place in the prevailing view of the priesthood. The link with the local community was effectively broken and by ordination the priest obtained a direct relationship with Christ, and was responsible to the local bishop (2). Many argue that this modern view of the priesthood, reinforced by the Council of Trent, has led to the accretion of the power and status of the priest and to the problems of clericalism.

Moving beyond will require moving to a more humble ordained priesthood, focussed on serving the People of God, and firmly embedded within the concept of the priesthood of the baptised. Achieving this will require many changes, from scrapping the old trappings of princely power and total reorientation of the selection and training of potential priests to a much clearer sense of the role of the priest within a genuinely synodal community.

### **Beyond Clericalism: An Inclusive Priesthood**

In respect of the composition of the priesthood, Schillebeeckx (2) has pointed out the apostles selected by Jesus were all men, most of whom (at least) were married. But, he argues, one of these (the maleness) cannot acquire theological significance while the other (being married) is not only denied significance but interpreted in the opposite direction. This is a sign that both restrictions reflect historically conditioned cultural patterns rather than necessary elements of Christian ministry.

It is widely acknowledged that the restriction on married priests in many parts of the Church (other than the Eastern Rite) is a matter of Church discipline rather than moral teaching. There are widespread demands around the world for this discipline to be relaxed or abolished, and this seems likely to occur. Pope Francis has recently indicated that consideration should be given ordaining married *virī probati* - approved men who have made strong contributions to their local communities.

The situation with female priests is more complex. There is a strong demand from the People of God for women to be given full involvement in the ministry of the Church, and that full involvement is desperately needed. But Pope John Paul II ruled in 1994 that the 'the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women' (3). This prohibition was in part based on the declaration of the Congregation of the Faith in 1976, approved by Pope Paul VI (4). However the reasons given in these documents – that Christ did not choose a woman as an apostle, that this has always been the Church's tradition and that the priest is a sacramental sign of Christ, and this can only be so if the priest is a man – can only be described as weak. They are unlikely to long survive the profound moral imperative to allow women to take their full part in the Church.

### **Proposals to the Plenary Council**

The Plenary Council 2020 should endorse the importance of the priesthood of the baptised, and the need to reinforce this role to overcome the problems of clericalism arising from a dominant focus on the priesthood of the ordained.

Some suggestions for implementing this rebalancing follow:

- Set up a Commission, with a lay chair and majority lay membership, to make suggestions about how to strengthen the priesthood of the baptised;
- Direct parishes to give more recognition and authority to lay ministries;

- Strengthen the role of parish councils and remove their role as consultative only to the priest;
- Give parishes a direct say in the selection of their priest, and dioceses in the selection of bishops; and
- Transform the education of priests, for example by abolishing seminaries and developing formation programs better integrated into the life of the Church and of broader society.

On the question of the composition of the ordained priesthood, we suggest that the Plenary Council should:

- Endorse the principle that all persons – male or female, single or married – should be eligible to become priest, and transmit this view to the Pope;
- Sharply reduce the practice of bringing priests from overseas to offset the shortage of local priests;
- Immediately implement a *virī probati* program for the ordination of married men and for the re-admission of men who have left the priesthood to marry; and
- Begin a process for the ordination of women as deacons.

#### References

1. Pope Francis, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God*, 20 August 2018.
2. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ*, Crossroads Publishing Company, 1984.
3. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 22 May 1994.
4. Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*, 15 October 1976

## **Governance: The Current Model is Broken**

Attachment 4 to the Submission to Plenary Council 2020  
from St Kevin's Parish, Lower Templestowe  
6 March 2019

The Catholic Church in Melbourne and in Australia, and especially its model of governance, is in desperate need of reform. It is clear, based on the evidence, that the current male, clerical, celibate, hierarchical governance model is broken and has failed both because of the undue deference and submissiveness of the Church community towards their leaders and the inadequacy of those leaders in dealing with the actions and presence of depraved, evil or simply weak colleagues, sometimes out of a belief that these individuals were special, sacred, separate and superior in holiness.

This view of the special and extraordinary nature of the ordained priesthood, "superior in holiness and knowledge" was rejected by the Second Vatican Council, which gave priority to Baptism, "the most fundamental Christian calling". (See "Realising the dream of Vatican II" by Fr Noel Connolly SSC, *Plenary Post Edition 10, Nov. 2018*). Vatican II recognised that all Christians have the sense of faith and have a role in the leadership of the Church.

Moreover, Pope Francis has called for bishops to lead a "resolute process of discernment, purification and reform" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #30) in their local communities and to not only "encourage and develop the means of participation proposed in the Code of Canon Law", but to encourage and develop other forms of dialogue, and to listen to everyone, "not simply to those who would tell him what he would like to hear" (EG, #31). Indeed, the Pope suggests at times the bishop's role is to learn from, and follow, his people.

### **Returning to a way of being Church**

We need a return to the way of 'being Church' present from the very beginnings of the Christian community, where the lay people played an active role in all of Church life, "including the election of bishops and the designation of ministers" (Brother Emile of Taizé: *Faithful to the Future*, p 109). This 'way of being Church' is in line with the movement towards synodality or 'walking together' being explored by theologians and encouraged by Pope Francis. (Cf INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION: *SYNODALITY IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH*). Such a way of being is the realisation of the catholicity of the Church. Anything less is a failure to be the Catholic church.

#### **A Key First Step**

A practical first step on the part of the ordained clergy and Church hierarchy in Australia in regard to the leadership of parishes and dioceses, would be the adoption and implementation of the principles of the Governance Institute of Australia (GIA) ([www.governanceinstitute.com.au](http://www.governanceinstitute.com.au)) in their leadership of the Church community. The GIA definition of 'governance' is expressed in the following terms:

*Governance encompasses the system by which an organisation is controlled and operates, and the mechanisms by which it, and its people, are held to account. Ethics, risk management, compliance and administration are all elements of governance.*

While this definition is mainly in the context of corporate governance, the same principles apply to boards of not-for-profit organisations- including not-for-profit Catholic organisations - such as schools, hospitals and charitable organisations. In this day and age, similar principles should apply to the Catholic Church.

The GIA suggests that there are four key components of governance. While they are expressed in the corporate context, their applicability to the Church context is added. They are:

1. Transparency; being clear and unambiguous about the organisation's structure, operations and performance, both externally and internally, and maintaining a genuine dialogue with, and providing insight to, legitimate stakeholders and the market generally (in the Church context: .... maintaining a genuine dialogue with, and providing insight to, the members of the church and the community generally);
2. Accountability; ensuring that there is clarity of decision-making within the organisation, with processes in place to ensure that the right people have the right authority for the organisation to make effective and efficient decisions, with appropriate consequences for failures to follow those processes;
3. Stewardship: developing and maintaining an enterprise-wide recognition that the organisation is managed for the benefit of its shareholders/members, taking reasonable account of the interests of other legitimate stakeholders (in the Church context: .... managed for the care of the members of the church, and of those in the broader community who are oppressed or in need);
4. Integrity: developing and maintaining a culture committed to ethical behaviour and compliance with the law.

In practice

In practice this approach would mean that every parish and every diocese would be required to have a pastoral council and financial council. Broad and equal lay participation in consultation and planning would be required, as would regular reports by the parish priest and bishop respectively, giving an account of their leadership. With proper documentation of the affairs of these councils (minutes of council meetings, reports, etc.), this approach would address the four key components of governance outlined above – transparency, accountability, stewardship and integrity.

In addition, a diocesan synod would be required every three years or when requested by an agreed number of parish councils [rather than “when circumstances suggest it in the judgement of the diocesan bishop” (Canon 461 #1)]. Such synods would be organised and have representation in a similar way to the diocesan synods of the Anglican church.

Making Right Decisions

The GIA also suggests that governance is vital to making the right decisions, and that in making key decisions officers in an organisation should ask themselves a fundamental question:

*What would ordinary, right-thinking members of the community – knowing all the relevant facts – believe to be an appropriate exercise of stewardship in such circumstances?*

It is abundantly clear that some past decisions of the Catholic Church in Australia, such as decisions regarding paedophile priests, have not been the “right” decisions, and they would certainly not have been taken if the above question (a version of the “pub” test) had been addressed.

In practice

Governance training should be required for all parish priests, for clergy involved in administration of any church organisation and for members of parish and diocesan councils with the assistance of an independent body such as the GIA.

## Cultural Change: A Harder Task

We need real conversion of heart, renewed understanding of the shared sense of faith of all the baptised, a renewed will and ability on the part of the Bishops to listen to the faithful, especially those whose words are not comforting. We need a willingness on the part of all the lay members of the Church community to speak the truth in faith to those in authority and with respect for the dignity of all. We need a willingness on the part of all to enter into genuine dialogue (cf. *Ecclesiam Suam*), and trust that the Holy Spirit is renewing our community for this time.

While such cultural change, even with goodwill on the part of all, will take years and probably decades, it can begin with the structural changes proposed above. Note, however, that the limited practical changes suggested above will have no impact and may even have a negative impact if the major cultural change – the conversion of heart – is not promoted by planned, systematic, strategic action. Such action could include:

- The systematic development of a renewed theology of being Church as a whole people with its implications for the practice of all members of the community and the recognition of the ministry of all members
- A renewed theology of the priesthood – one that does not elevate ordained priests as ‘above lay people’, or encourage a sense of entitlement – and the complete restructuring of the selection of applicants for the priesthood and of seminary training to promote more wholistic development of those seeking to be ordained.
- The introduction of greater flexibility and variety for those men or women seeking to be ordained, including optional celibacy for priests and limited tenure for bishops.
- The development of practical initiatives such as the appropriate representative membership of decision-making bodies, as well as processes that ensured that major decisions made by bishops had the endorsement of the people of God.

These are only some of the changes that we believe are needed to support the renewal of the Catholic church community. Others with greater knowledge, experience and professional qualifications could identify a comprehensive and systematic approach that includes these elements. The elements listed above, however, are essential to a desperately needed new approach to being the Catholic church in Australia.

Resources and References:

Brother Emile of Taizé: Faithful to the Future: Listening to Yves Congar, London: Bloomsbury, 2013 p 109

Connolly, N SSC, "Realising the dream of Vatican II", *Plenary Post Edition 10, Nov. 2018*.

Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION: SYNODALITY IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodality\\_en.html#\\_edn101](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodality_en.html#_edn101) (Accessed 17 November, 2018)

Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*

Taylor Robinson, G. "A church in crisis needing attention" Presentation to the NCP Convention, Canberra, 11 September, 2018 published in *The Swag*, Vol. 26 No. 4, 2018

The Governance Institute of Australia (GIA) ([www.governanceinstitute.com.au](http://www.governanceinstitute.com.au))

# Liturgy for a Synodal Church

Attachment 5 to the Submission to Plenary Council 2020  
from St Kevin's Parish, Lower Templestowe  
6 March 2019

## Language of Liturgy: Literal Translations

*"Either eat this soup or jump out of the window"*<sup>2</sup>

This is the literal translation of a well known Italian saying<sup>3</sup>. The translation is not very revealing in Australian English as it fails to convey the saying's meaning.

Australians may guess what the translation is getting at, but they cannot be sure. The language is unclear, it is not effective, it does not deliver. A more meaningful Australian translation of the Italian saying above might be: *"It's this way or the highway."*

This is analogous to the effect of the current Missal translation in Australia. The language is convoluted and the word for word translation is ineffective in ensuring that the people of God can fully participate in worship.

Pope Francis has called for a re-evaluation of the 2001 Vatican instruction *Liturgiam Authenticam*. We at St Kevin's respectfully ask our bishops to stop adopting the literal translation and to consider other options that are more relevant and meaningful in contemporary Australia. A starting point could be looking at the 1998 translation that was never implemented. This will enable Australian Catholics to fully participate in the liturgy. Language devoid of meaning is futile.

Literal translations are ineffective. To enable full participation in the liturgy we need language that speaks to Australians and engages their mind, hearts and imagination.

## Inclusive Language in Liturgy

Is inclusive language in the liturgy much to do about nothing? We at St Kevin's believe we shall never achieve "full, active participation in the liturgy" called for in the "constitution on the liturgy" of 2nd Vatican Council until our language in the liturgy matches lived experience in the day life of our people.

Please remember that even those of middle age have long lived with newspapers, magazines & TV that use "man" to mean "male". Yet in our liturgy we are faced with any number of examples such as these we quote.

18th Sunday year B "The whole community of the sons of Israel"....I have heard the complaints of the sons..." followed by "mere men ate the bread of angels".

St Paul & St James in second reading often commence "my brothers".

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<sup>2</sup>From the Italian: o mangiar questa minestra o saltar dalla finestra.

Of course, it is important to distinguish between vertical & horizontal inclusive language. We are not asking for a change to the Blessed Trinity. However, continuing to use sex exclusive titles for human beings continues to harm the Church's mission. Too many people already find such language offensive & is one of the stated reasons for men & women leaving the practice of their faith.

Inclusive language is no more than a recognition of contemporary culture & changes in the English language. Without this simple change we face the very real problem of becoming more & more out of step & irrelevant.

For how much longer must women pray "for us men and our salvation".

## Sacrament of Penance

A review of the Church's practice of the Sacrament of Penance is necessary

- I. The Third Rite of Reconciliation and General Absolution should return. People have "voted with their feet" and moved away from the practice of the Sacrament of Penance as it is currently celebrated.

The Third Rite of Reconciliation was well received in many places in Australia in the past. The Third Rite consisted a communal celebration of God's love, mercy and forgiveness. Many people participated in these liturgies which included general absolution. People gathered for the purpose of celebrating Christ's forgiveness, hearing the Word of God and a homily, performing an Examination of Conscience, making an act of contrition and making amendment. In November 1998 the practice of the Third Rite was ruled out.<sup>4</sup>

Now fewer people are availing themselves of individual reconciliation. I have heard priests report that although Confessions are scheduled, on most occasions no-one turns up. Therefore, the reality is that most Australian Catholics do not access any form of Sacramental Penance, ever<sup>5</sup>. The People of God have not accepted the teaching that the communal rite of penance is "illegitimate".

The Third Rite of Penance and General Absolution should return. The re-establishment of the more ancient communal rite of penance will hopefully mean that, people would again celebrate the Sacrament of God's love, mercy and forgiveness. The Spiritual benefit to people would be a greater number availing themselves of the Sacrament.

- II. The practice of routinely requiring all 8/9-year-old Baptised Catholic children to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance is inappropriate.

The practice of routinely requiring all 8-year-old Baptised Catholic children to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance is inappropriate. While children of this age are beginning to develop an understanding of right and wrong, they are not at the development stage of understanding the concept of sin. I would argue that an 8-year-old is not capable of serious sin. Intervening in a child's psychological and moral growth with a serious negative concept could be damaging if not handled competently and professionally. We argue that such a negative approach is not necessary. In an age

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.catholic.org.au/acbc-media/downloads/public-policy/518-acbc-general-statements-1998-1/file>  
See paragraph 45

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/columnists/3/14818/some-of-my-correspondents-said-that-general-absolution-should-return-full-stop>



in which research into child psychology points to the advantage of using a positive approach to child behaviour management, this Confessional process and the concept of sin seem foreign. A short anecdote may shed light: Recently, on the afternoon of her sister's First Confession, my exuberant granddaughter bounced through my front door exclaiming "Nanna, Nanna, Lucy needs a SIM before tonight for her Confession!" To which I replied, "There is one in my phone she can have if she wants it!" It all seems a strange process in an otherwise contemporary, systematic and integrated Catholic School Curriculum.

Almost all children who celebrate their "First Reconciliation" (unless corralled in or required again by the school or parish) do not take part in the Sacrament again in their life. This is the reality. What else do schools put children through that they will never do again? Schools have the role of preparing children for life.

### Confirmation

The sacrament of Confirmation is the opportunity for baptised Christians to renew their baptismal vows and make a decision to link their life to the teachings of Jesus. The age at which confirmation is administered is critical in so far as the life journey being proposed needs to be clearly understood and accepted.

\* In the United States , Bishops" after several times tabling a decision on an appropriate age, voted that the normal age of Confirmation is 7 to 18 years . " Therefore if it is accepted that age is a critical factor in when Confirmation is received then a person of teenage years is more likely to understand the commitments being made.

Peer pressure also clouds a teenagers thinking and in this regard small group training for Confirmation would be advantageous. The Bonding and support of each other would be stronger and more supportive. Further a committed teenage is more likely to have meaningful conversations regarding religion and influencing their parents. This could lead to parents renewing their faith.

Having experienced the Rite of Confirmation carried out by the local priest in an outback central Queensland Catholic Church with children from the local schools, the ceremony was more meaningful in that the whole congregation was involved. An example of participation as a small group.\*\*If necessary the Bishop has authority to delegate the celebration of this sacrament to presbyters and deacons. This would have to be implemented if small group training and celebration was introduced.

I have no comment on changing the actual ceremony of the Rite of Confirmation, I think that the preparation and participation of both student and parents need consideration. The current preparation and celebration of Confirmation, of mass numbers, does not appear to bring the participants and families of those being Confirmed back to the Church.

\*- Saying P 87 Amen: A Mystagogy of Sacraments -Kathleen Hughes \*\* - See P82 - Minister of the Sacrament - Amen: A Mastagogy of Sacraments - Kathleen Hughes

### Anointing of the sick

We believe that a number of sacraments are in need of review. One such sacrament is "the sacrament of the sick". Vatican II highlighted the change of this sacrament from "The Last Rites" (extreme unction). Unfortunately, 60 years later the majority of Australian Catholics still think of this

beautiful, consoling and encouraging sacrament as “The Last Rites” and rush to have a priest come and anoint their relative even after the “recipient” has died.

We propose a training of ministers for this sacrament. 60 years ago, only the priest distributed Holy Communion at Mass and took Communion to the elderly and “shut ins” once a month on a 1<sup>st</sup> Friday. Now, weekly, special ministers take Communion to hospitals, nursing homes etc. They can do this because they are taking the host, consecrated by a priest at the Sunday Mass. In the same way, these special ministers would take the sacred oils, blessed by the Bishop at the Annual Mass of Chrism. These ministers have a special relationship with those whom they visit. In chatting, they are in a much better position to communicate the beautiful meaning of the sacrament of the sick.

At present, the priest is sometimes a stranger to the sick/elderly person and so can elicit an unfortunate fear. Sadly, to overcome this concern a lot of people wait until “Mum is comatose and doesn’t know” (or worse has died!). What a terrible image of God this projects that God only takes to heaven, those anointed before death.

We strongly recommend immediate training and implementation of lay ministers, not only for a better use of the sacraments but also its more appropriate use will help to bring about the change of mindset in our people. Thus this sacrament will be seen in its true healing. It will be seen as the gentle Christ caring for the sick person.

## **Hearing the Cry of the Earth**

Attachment 6 to the Submission to Plenary Council 2020  
from St Kevin's Parish, Lower Templestowe  
6 March 2019

We share, with many around the world, deep concern about the degradation of the natural environment and the massive challenges to future generations posed by global warming. In many countries, including Australia, the land and the rivers are seriously polluted, water is in short supply, many species of plants and animals are becoming extinct, extreme events such as cyclones, floods and droughts are becoming more frequent and the both the atmosphere and the oceans are warming. The impacts of climate change on Australia are well documented, for example, by the Australian Department of Environment and Energy<sup>6</sup>. These trends severely threaten the quality of life of future generations, and hence are rightly of special concern to young people.

They also impact most heavily on the poor, both within and across countries. The poor tend to live with poor housing on marginal land, and in worse environmental conditions. Thus they bear the greatest impact of climate change, without the resources to protect themselves from its ravages.

These massive challenges have their roots in historic changes going back to early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but fall to this generation to address. Between 1800 and 2018, global population has increased 7-fold, from one billion to 7 billion, and continues to rise. Energy use has risen 28-fold over this time, with over 90% of this provided by fossil fuels, with per capita energy use many times higher in developed countries than in poor ones.

While the present problems have long historical roots, they are starkly evident in current events. Australia has always been 'a sunburnt land .. of droughts and flooding rains', but climate change is greatly increasing the prevalence of such extreme events around the world. The recent drought conditions across New South Wales (one farmer destroyed 1200 of his starving sheep) and the devastating floods in the Townsville region of Queensland (3300 properties damaged or destroyed and up to 500,000 cattle destroyed) have had a devastating impact.

The human impact of these occurrences both physically and mentally has been highlighted in print media and visual media and both Governments and the wider community have been generous in their support both financially and physically. For example, the New York Times carried in May 2018 a lead article about the extent of suicide among Australian farmers.

### **Global Leadership from Pope Francis: The Encyclical *Laudato Si'***

Many have written on this fundamental issue facing the human community, but the encyclical *Laudato Si'* from Pope Francis in May 2015 stands as a highlight of this literature, and as a major contribution to Catholic social thought. It has been widely acknowledged and admired by people from all faiths and walks of life.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/climate-change/climate-science-data/climate-science/impacts>.

Francis not only urges the need for immediate and practical steps to halt resource degradation and global warming, but also points out the need for a spiritual, ecological conversion. Rather than the prevailing view the human beings can possess, master and transform nature for their own use, Francis reminds us that God is present in nature, that the spirit of life dwells in every living creature and that we are part of nature and called by God to preserve and complete, rather than destroy it. What is needed, then, is a spiritual conversion leading to much greater respect for the unity between man and nature, as well as specific actions to halt the degradation of the Earth.

The biblical foundations of this view have been powerfully developed by the leading scriptural scholar Francis Moloney<sup>7</sup>, who argues that these foundations could valuably be developed further. We also have much to learn on these matters from the original inhabitants of Australia, our indigenous peoples.

The response to *Laudato si'* within the Australian Church has been muted, to say the least, and perhaps especially on the part of the Bishops. But this has not been the case in some other countries. The box below briefly describes the response in the Philippines, which could provide a model for a more active and transformative response in Australia.

#### **Responding to *Laudato si'* – the Case of the Philippines**

If you want to see an inspiring example of engagement with *Laudato si'*— Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment — look to the Philippines. Catholics in the Philippines, more than anywhere else, have brought this encyclical to life and made it their own. *Laudato si'* was published in June 2015. Within a month the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines released a strong [statement](#) backing the central concerns of the encyclical: ecology, stewardship, and concern for the poor.

Indeed, the effort to combat climate change seemed so important to them that they invoked the Mandatum of Holy Thursday, saying: "caring about climate change and its deleterious and devastating effects on all, but especially on impoverished and struggling nations and communities...is how, today, we must wash each others' feet."

Their efforts on the ground reflect the vigor of this statement. Church groups have [lobbied for clean energy](#); fought the spread of polluting industries, deforestation, and mining; engaged indigenous communities in [planting trees](#); and [worked for solar-energy access](#) for off-grid communities in poor areas.

The bishops have long been [concerned for local biodiversity](#), and they [continue to press](#) for its protection. They've [held educational conferences](#) to unpack *Laudato si'*, and worked to develop a new mindset of conservation [among young people](#). The [World Day of Prayer](#) for the Care of Creation, followed by a month long "season of creation," has a place in their calendar.

When the Global Catholic Climate Movement wanted to launch [the \*Laudato si'\* pledge](#) in 2017, they did not come to the United States. They went to Manila. The Archbishop there, Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, [invited Catholics around the world](#) to make a personal commitment to protecting the environment: "I don't want to sound presumptuous, but I would like to say that I am speaking in the name of the church, in the name of humanity, in the name of the poor, in the name of our common home, creation, in inviting you to please sign the *Laudato si'* pledge."

Rita Ferrone, Commonweal, reprinted in La Croix International.

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<sup>7</sup> Frances J Moloney, 'The Gospel of Creation: a Biblical Response to *Laudato Si'*', in Francis J Moloney, Gospel Interpretation and Christian Life, AFT Press, Hindmarsh, 2017

## **The Response of the Australian Church: The Role of Plenary Council 2020**

We believe that the challenge of protecting and restoring the Earth is central to the future of Australia and indeed our whole planet, and is rightly of deep concern to the younger members of our communities, whose future is all before them. As a result we suggest that Plenary Council 2020 should follow the lead of Pope Francis and make protecting the environment and meeting the challenge of climate change one of the central duties of Australian Catholics. Not only is this the right thing to do but it will serve to energise local Catholic communities and involve them in working close with many others also concerned about our environmental future.

We suggest that Plenary Council 2020 should consider these matters seriously and support initiatives such as the following:

1. Speaking out, regularly and consistently, from all levels of the Church community, emphasising
  - The need for a moral conversion, to attitudes and ways of living much more respectful of, and in harmony with, the natural world
  - Link this conversion explicitly with the message of Australia's indigenous peoples
  - Advocate strongly for real policy changes to address global warming, such as the progressively elimination of coal-fired generation and the preservation of water resources and animal and plant species.
2. Establishing institutions, both at the national and local level, to give ongoing effect to the ongoing centrality of the environment to the Church's mission.
3. Support, through these institutions and in other ways, local initiatives to preserve the natural environment and to reduce emissions.
4. Follow the example of the Church in the Philippines, in giving high priority to activities to study and implement *Laudato Si'*.

## Attachment 7

### Social Justice Team of St Kevin's Parish Templestowe

Plenary council submission i)

As we go to sleep in a safe, warm and secure home around 140,000 of our brothers and sisters are sleeping rough in a cold, uncomfortable and unsafe place on the street somewhere. This number does not include people living in expensive boarding houses, moving from friend to friends homes, living in cars or staying somewhere where they are being physically and/or sexually exploited. Having adequate shelter is a basic human right and a quintessential element of living a dignified life. Australian bishops have made strong statements bringing awareness to this catastrophe and have urged our government to do more to secure safe housing for those that need it. This is a great starting response. There have been some Catholic agencies that do and have directly responded to the need of homeless. Organizations like the St Vincent de Paul Society and Sacred Heart Mission both directly provide a safe place to sleep. 2013 the Marist brother ran a project to build homes in Blacktown, Sydney. However more needs to be done.

As a church the living body of Jesus we needed take a more active approach to help. Pope Francis opened a homeless shelter near the Vatican. He also gave sleeping bags to those that needed them. He has opened showers and offered barber services in St Peter's square. What an amazing example of faith in action. Can we also not take inspiration from our spiritual leader. Can we look at creating a national project focusing on ways to find safe accommodation and/but also to create ways to help them while they are struggling to find shelter. Small actions, like those initiated by the pope can make a huge difference and if implemented all over Australia could make a real impact. There are many reasons people find themselves in transient situations and providing long term solutions can be very complicated. Cost of housing and rent, domestic violence, psychiatric illness, family breakdown alcohol and substance abuse are all major contributing factors, however that does not mean we should just become catatonic or indifferent. Let us not just walk past and ignore their existence. Our Lord spent his life on earth seeking out the poor, excluded and disposed. Homeless people find themselves isolated and vulnerable. We must find ways to put our faith into action whether through small initiatives or large projects. We can't sit back and expect/demand someone else to do something.

"Whatsoever I say you do it to the least of my brothers, you do it to me", Matthew 25.

We are fortunate to have a free press, however they sometimes have an agenda, often political, to spread untruths about cultures and nationalities and particularly when crime is involved, exaggerate the truth to vilify whole communities. During elections political parties use misinformation as a scare tactic to sway voters.

It is the responsibility of the church to refute these false claims and to offer welcome and safety if needed to peoples affected by these prejudices. Catholicism can be an inclusive faith, far from what our lord said we must do. We celebrate many wonderful feasts, many copied by non-believers and by those who have left the church. These are spent with family and friends rarely strangers. At the plenary council lets encourage the welcoming of new arrivals and refugees. Let parishes listen to the stories of new arrivals, take them to a football match, a coffee, find out if they need anything, help with studies or learning English. Parishes are powerful to change stereotype misconceptions about newcomers and take action in making them part of our community. A strong message from our

church leaders will resonate throughout our church community beyond so we may be a beacon of tolerance, understanding and hope.

### Social Justice Team of St Kevin's Parish Templestowe

Plenary council submission ii)

We at St Kevin's Parish Victoria wish to acknowledge the wonderful social justice work performed through the inspiration of the Catholic Church. We honour Caritas, Vinnies, Sacred Heart Mission, Catholic Care & much more that is heroically done through agencies, parishes, hospitals & schools.

Nevertheless, we take this opportunity to ask the Plenary council to further the cause of the vulnerable in our society. We believe the Church's role is to accompany those who suffer the most.

A long standing issue of justice in our society is Australia's treatment of refugees & asylum seekers. We commend the social justice statements of recent times especially the 2015 "For those who have come across the seas.". We have liturgies discussions, press releases, Papal statements all of which only seem to have a temporary impact on our society. What else can we do?

We ask that the Catholic Church be seen to be pro active in promoting on a regular basis forum, political rallies & penitential services in conjunction with all other religions & people of good will. Let us be energetic in our desire to raise Australian people above "The globalisation of indifference" as Pope Francis has so graphically described the first world's attitude to refugees.

Another issue of major concern for us is centred around our ageing population. As Oscar Wilde observed "sometimes age comes alone". In her address at the launch of the justice statement of 2016 (A Place at the Table) Sr Patty Fawkner reminded us that the elderly have so much to offer society. Yet we live in a society that wants to deny ageing. Because old age can be frightening & open to vulnerability old age can become hidden in the rush & tear of our modern world 's speed & glamour.

We ask the Plenary Council to highlight the gifts of the old e.g. patience, peace, mellowness gratitude & warm appreciation of family & friends. Two practical ways of achieving this are: Do we ask our schools to align "grand parents day" with the feast of Saints Joachim & Anne? We ask the church to establish a national agency which speaks for the old & researches the variety of needs of this important part of our society.

on behalf of,  
Social Justice Team of St Kevin's Parish Templestowe