

RESPONSE TO PLENARY COUNCIL 2020

by a group from St Mary's Williamstown

30th January 2019

1. What is God asking of us in Australia at this time?

We believe that this is our opportunity to re-imagine the church of Australia. To do this we need a governance structure that enables other ways of being church, where all the baptised use their gifts and talents to bring the good news to the world. We hope for a community of love, a "Jesus church" and a less institutionalised church than exists today. We want to be able to listen and respond to people's needs; to be a church that celebrates the joy of the Gospel in daily life, that operates under a new egalitarian model, not the current pyramid model. We seek:

ACCOUNTABILITY VIA:

- New structures which empower all the baptised to take on roles in governance and service in dioceses and parishes that best suit people's talents
- The freeing up of the ordained from parish administration to allow for more effective priestly work.
- Consultation on all appointments of bishops, parish priests and all who work in any capacity in a parish, with performance reviews becoming an accepted mode of operation.

INVOLVEMENT

- Many of the baptised feel isolated and unable to participate fully in the life of the church. Changes need to be made to parish structures. Leadership needs to be shared amongst all the baptised. Ordination should not be a prerequisite for leadership.
- Women are treated in a tokenistic manner and are angered by this. The church needs an attitudinal shift to align itself with civil society and welcome all women to engage fully in the life of the church.
- There are many who feel marginalised by the structures of the church: the elderly; Aboriginal people; youth; the divorced and re-married; LGBTQI people; the sick and the dying; single people; former priests; those with a disability; those who have been hurt by the church, especially those damaged through the sexual abuse scandals and others who are disengaged as a result of hurtful or bad experiences. These people need to be allowed to engage purposefully in the life of the church.

OUTREACH

- The nameless, the voiceless, the broken all need to feel the love of Jesus through our actions and intentions.
- Deaneries should pool resources to better support the needs of:
 - the poor: those who lack the means to live a life with adequate housing, food, physical, psychological and spiritual health, education and work.

- Australian youth who are often are disengaged from the church. Aside from school experiences, many Catholic youth view the church as an outdated and irrelevant institution, offering them nothing of value. Deaneries could work with local or regional schools to address this issue.

430 words

2. What questions do you have about the future of the Church for the Plenary Council to consider in 2020?

We believe that God is asking us to re-imagine the church in Australia. In 21st century Australia we are experiencing the demands of (and in no particular order):

- living in a post-modern world with unprecedented exposure to social media and unparalleled access to information where parish life is no longer at the centre of people's lives
- living with a church that has lost moral authority in the world, exacerbated by the ramifications of the child abuse scandals, including the loss of respect for and tolerance of the clergy
- living with outmoded and inadequate governance structures across dioceses and parishes that are exposed by the absence of women
- living with diminishing numbers of priests who feel overwhelmed by their administrative roles in parishes and the burden of their age
- living with a church that denies opportunities to discuss the issues of married and women priests
- living with the diminishing engagement of the baptised with liturgy and parish life
- living with inadequate pastoral care provision in parishes because of a skewed priority for 'bricks and mortar' by a majority of parish priests
- living with unsatisfactory treatment of women, the elderly; Aboriginal people; youth; the divorced and re-married; LGBTQI people; the sick and the dying; single people; former priests; those with a disability; and others who are disengaged as a result of hurtful or bad experiences
- Living with inadequate adult faith formation

Our question is: since the current approach to church life in Australia is clearly not working, will the Plenary Council 2020 take the brave step of re-imagining new ways of governance, outreach and inclusivity for and with all the baptised?

269 words

3. Do you have a story of your experience of faith, or the Church you would like to share?

The members of our submission group all share memories of a church that in the past was at the centre of our lives. Parish life offered opportunities for people to come together as a community for liturgy, for significant moments in life and to mix socially. While that seemingly ideal age ended some decades ago, it was not a given that Catholics should lose opportunities for shared and transformational liturgies.

For our group, the story of the 3rd Rite of Reconciliation typifies this loss. We understand that this Rite was a post Vatican 11 attempt to offer Australian Catholics a sacrament that was necessary, relevant and transformative. It was well received and well attended, giving people an experience that reflected the very nature of the sacrament. Catholics understand what is conscience and the 3rd Rite of Reconciliation offered a valuable opportunity to reflect on our lives using our social and communal conscience. It did not damage the solemnity of the sacrament in people's eyes, rather it offered comfort and hope that individually and as a community we could live more authentically as the people of our God who is love.

The loss of this Rite of Reconciliation diminishes us. It has affected adversely us all and many Catholics no longer receive this sacrament. This is a serious loss, damaging us both individually and communally. We become a people adrift, less accepting of 'the other' and more isolated. We believe this is indicative of how many Australian Catholics feel.

We pray for the members of the 2020 Plenary Council that they have listening hearts and the courage to act for the good of the Australian church.

275 words