

Submission for the Plenary Council 2020

In the partnered parishes of Deepdene & Balwyn and Camberwell in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, at least 140 people gathered to reflect, pray, and share their thoughts about the Plenary Council and the question, “What is God asking of us in Australia today?”. The responses from this cohort of individuals that reflect the demographic of our two parishes in age, culture, faith, gender and commitment, are presented below. Four main themes emerged – Welcome & Inclusion, Faith & Formation, Governance, and Youth.

WELCOME AND INCLUSION

We are being asked to build community. Communities within the Church that are welcoming and inclusive of all groups regardless of age, nationality, culture, lifestyle, or life situation. We are challenged to be courageous listeners, welcoming the outcast, and those who may not comply with the rules of the Church. We are called to be compassionate and non-reactive. Our Communities are to ensure an equal voice for all, especially for women. We are to seek authentic change from the grass roots, recognising the wealth of wisdom and insight of the faithful elders who have much life experience, the youth who are our future and whose life and faith is so different, the divorced and those disengaged from the Church, the gay community and those who no longer feel welcomed, and the children who have been denied a voice for so long.

FAITH AND FORMATION

Open & Transparent

We are being asked, that even though we have lost the joy of Vatican II, the credibility as a Church and our own participation, we need to work at being open to change and new ways of thinking. God is calling us to be transparent in service, displaying prophetic leadership, so that we might rediscover and rearticulate our faith for today’s world. We are called to make new for today, Acts 2:42 – “They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and the prayers”.

Love One Another

We are challenged to remember that the Church does not have a mission, but rather the mission has a Church that can fulfil the call of Jesus Christ to love one another. In this context God is asking Australia to be a church firmly grounded in love and justice for all, that will spread this message of love through concern and care for others. It is through our charity that we can refocus the simple message of Jesus, that love underpins all.

Our Faith for Today

Our Church is challenged to be relevant for today in a world that has changed and continues to evolve and change. We are called to honour and affirm the mission of our baptism, to have courage to speak our stories, particularly the story of God’s truth. The message of our faith must be proclaimed and spoken in language that is people centred, and is appropriate and relevant for today’s changing world. We are called to consider the ways in which this can happen through faith formation in primary, secondary and tertiary education, particularly giving example through prayer and action.

GOVERNANCE

Collaborative Leadership

We are being asked to create a new model of church that welcomes a more collaborative leadership model which is both compassionate and ethical, and open to new approaches to being pastoral in our care of others. God is asking the Church in Australia to adopt a governance structure that welcomes lay leadership, including women in the activities of the Church and its direction. This model is asking for lay people to fully develop their potential and utilise their skills and abilities. The challenge for realising this structure is for the Church to live as servant of the people with clergy supported by lay involvement. All aspects of this form of governance should reflect moral and social concerns. God is asking us to be open to various forms of leadership within this governance structure, especially the ordination of all who are qualified.

Women

As the Australian Church we are being asked to acknowledge the role of women in leadership, which includes participation in major decision making, equality of employment in the structures of the Church, ordination to the priesthood and voting rights to the Plenary Council in 2020.

Conversation

God is asking us to enter into an open conversation about the Church of today so that we might reimagine and dream the possibilities for our Church. We are challenged to empower people to voice their dissent in a safe environment and seek together for solutions.

Priestly Role

In Australia today God is asking us to consider the role of the priest, simplifying their procedural responsibilities and emphasising the pastoral and spiritual aspects of their ministry. We are called to consider further how women can be included in the formation of students for ordination. The challenge for the Church is to determine how clericalism can be eliminated.

YOUTH

God is asking us to be people who are compassionate and inclusive, who will journey with young people from school to young adults through the three elements of belief, celebration and service. We are called to renew the liturgy and to be immersed in issues of social justice so that we all might foster a well formed, confident cohort of young people who can move forward in the way of a pilgrim Church.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH FOR THE PLENARY COUNCIL TO CONSIDER IN 2020

WELCOME AND INCLUSION

- How are we going to make the radical changes that are needed without disengaging the older parishioners?
- How will the Church hear and respond to the yearnings of people of all ages for belonging and building of community?
- How can the Church reflect demographic diversity?
- Will the Church become more accepting of same-sex attracted people and their families?
- How can the Church be inclusive of all people, including divorced and LGBTI?
- How can the Church be a witness to society, including in the support of special interest groups?
- Will the Church explore more ways for outreach to the poor and disadvantaged?

GOVERNANCE

- How can we reconcile universality and local control within the Church?
- When will the Council act on the recommendations from the Plenary Council and how will change be prioritised?
- Will the Church explore different options for Church leadership in the future, for example married priests, female priests, mature aged applicants and recognise the leadership potential of the young? How can the Church abolish clericalism?
- Will feedback from the Plenary Council in Australia be taken to Rome?
- What is the timeline for any expected action from the Plenary Council?
- To what extent will the Bishops listen and act on the requests and thoughts of the people?
- How will the Plenary Council listen to the people of the Church and acknowledge that women are the backbone of the church?
- What changes have occurred in the Catholic Church as a result of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse? When will recommendations be implemented?
- How can the Church be a place of equity for all and where there is no discrimination?
- What concrete actions will the Church take at every parish level to stop exploitation so we can confidently present the faith?
- What renewal of the Church's governance structure will the Council consider and recommend?
- How will the future Church be relevant to our children and grandchildren?
- When is the Church going to be more inclusive of women in the church and give women more authority, including ordination?
- How can we make the Church the servant of the people and solve the problem of clericalism?
- What positions do women hold in the Church in roles of employment services, administration and equality? How can women have a significant role in the Church as they often represent 70% of the gathered community in parishes?
- Will priests be provided with better training for administration of parishes?
- To what extent do Bishops recognise that the reputation of the Church in the community is very low?
- How will the Church address the declining number of priests, especially in rural areas?
- How do we de-clericalize the Church?

- Will the Church be more selective in the choice of seminarians and their training?
- In what ways can the Church be a more positive influence in society?
- Will marriage in all aspects be re-examined?
- Is the Church prepared to empower women?
- How will the Church acknowledge, reconcile and apologise to the victims of abuse and create an environment where this will not happen again, and call out to the members of the church who have left in disgust to return to the faith so that Church can be reignited?
- How will Bishops ensure that they are in touch with people today?
- Is there a plan for Bishops to have ongoing professional development?
- How can the laity be greatly involved (not just token) in decision making?
- What opportunities are available for women in the Church?
- In what ways will the Church be open to the challenges of the future in relation to governance structures and flexibility?
- How can priests be assisted to focus on their role as spiritual leaders?
- Why are women not included in discussion groups for major decision making?
- Is there a role for former priests in ministry?
- Would the Church consider a broader group to attend the Plenary Council which is more representative of the entire Catholic community?
- What are the bishops intending to do about the (few) number of lay people involved in the Plenary Council?
- Why are so few women involved in leadership roles?
- How can more emphasis be placed on a "Servant Church"?
- Will mandatory celibacy be reconsidered?
- How can the laity be involved in the appointment of Parish Priests and Bishops?
- What is the role of the laity in the Church?
- What voice is the Church going to give the laity in relation to governance and responsibility?
- How do we repair the damage to the "brand" of Catholic due to the abuse crisis?
- What can we do about the refugee issue?

FAITH AND FORMATION

- Why are people no longer attending Mass?
- How can the liturgy be made more relevant and modern?
- What is the future curriculum for religious formation for students in Catholic schools?
- Will the Council examine the role of Catholic education and religious instruction to create a vision for the modern community?
- How are children in Catholic schools today going to be Christian leaders tomorrow?
- Can we revisit Vatican II to see what is still relevant today?
- Can the Third Rite of Reconciliation be reintroduced with the validity of receiving forgiveness?
- What plans are in mind to reinvigorate the Church?

YOUTH

- How are we going to engage the future of the Church - children & youth?
- In what ways can the Church involve younger people in decision making?
- How can we retain young people in the Church once they leave school?
- Why does the Church's education system not cater for young adults who have special needs, for example, direction for daily living?
- Why are so many young people leaving the Church?