

**Final Report to Plenary Council
Submitted by the parishioners of
Holy Spirit and St Anthony's Parish
Alphington and Thornbury, Victoria**

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1. How we created this report

Here is the process our parish used to create this report:

- We formed a Parish Plenary Council Group (PPCG), to lead the parish's efforts in listening to the Holy Spirit and surfacing the materials used to create this report.
- The PPCG created a questionnaire of 5 questions, including the fundamental question posed by the Plenary Council:
 1. If you could make one change to the church in Australia, what would it be?
 2. In our highly connected secular world, how can the church be more relevant?
 3. How do we need to change our parish to better serve our community?
 4. Where do you encounter Jesus in our parish?
 5. What do you think is asking of us in Australia at this time?
- We distributed the questionnaire across the parish in 2 ways:
 1. We placed paper copies in the back of each church and a "Have your say" Suggestion Box for people to deposit their filled in questionnaires
 2. We emailed a questionnaire to every registered parishioner
- Throughout the period of listening we made announcements from the pulpit as well as in the Parish Bulletin, asking people to prayerfully reflect on the questions and submit their filled in questionnaires.
- We received approximately 25 filled in questionnaires (several were from small groups, transcribed by someone)
- The PPCG met and read and summarised the major themes across all the filled in questionnaires.
- The PPCG also met with 2 small groups and captured their insights.
 1. 14 School Captains
 2. 13 people in a small group
- 1. This report was then created as a draft using the PPCG summary, and the raw input from questionnaires to create the Major Themes and Supporting Quotes in Section 2 of this report.

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2. The two small group reports were used to validate the findings from the questionnaires. In a few cases, specific quotes were added to the material from the questionnaires, to enrich the material. In general, both small groups made the same points as the questionnaires.
3. The PPCG reviewed the draft report and made suggestions for improvement which were captured.
4. The entire draft report was emailed to everyone in the parish and their comments and suggested changes were captured. The draft was also placed in the back of the church and an announcement made requesting everyone review the draft.
5. The Final Report was created based on these inputs then submitted.

2. Major themes and supporting quotes

As is only natural, our parish looked at the question, “What is God asking of the Church in Australia at this time?” largely through the lens of our personal experiences of church. For many of us that means our parish has shaped our experiences. So, to understand our input you need to understand our parish.

Our parish

- Our active parishioners are, by and large, an aging group of adults. We have two churches in our parish. There are 400 people in the congregations associated with these churches that we have email addresses for. In the questionnaire phase, we placed questionnaires at the back of each church, and sent out questionnaires by email too. We continually asked for their input and heard back from less than 30 parishioners. The input we received from the parish was largely given by people aged 50 and up.
- We have two schools, one associated with each church. We did receive input from the School Captains, in the 6th grade, a specially arranged discussion session. Interestingly, when asked which church their parents attended, most of these students didn’t know. “The students’ church is the school” was the comment of the Assistant Principal. Except for specific events hosted by the schools, these students and their families don’t attend church.
- We have a significant number of first-generation Italian Australians who immigrated from Italy in the 1950s and 1960s who mainly speak Italian.
- Each church has a number of groups, such as choir, meditation, ministers of the Word and Eucharist, and refugee support, supported by dedicated people who generally attend Mass.

The responses to the questionnaires and the input from group discussions can be clustered into 3 major areas:

1. A view of what our parish needs to do locally
2. A view of what the “hierarchy” needs to do
3. General comments about certain high visibility issues.

We have created the main themes in each of these three areas and provided direct quotes from our parishioners that support these themes.

1. What our parish needs to do locally

1a. We need to better understand our youth and generate a vigorous focus on attracting and ministering to them

“Our church is out of touch and a turn off for our youth.”

“Keep abreast of the needs of youth.”

“Find ways to attract young people.”

“School parents, give us altar servers and come with your children to church.”

“Stronger bonds between school and church, closer cooperation with parishioners”

“Twin with another (international) parish and school, exchange ideas, share”

“Weave school subjects together with twin parish”

“Closer relationship with the other parish school, know school captains”

“Young people lead relationship building between the parishes”

“Youth group”

“One special night where the young people would invite their friends and hold special services.”

“Hold a tour of our church and explain what it’s all about”

“Special events planned by young people”

“Children’s liturgy expanded, create art about the gospel”

“Make gospel messages more child friendly”

“Videos and multimedia, use screens to keep kids’ attention, not just words on the screens”

“LEGO Bible stories”

1b. Our parish needs to be more engaged with our neighbourhood communities.

“Become a gathering place for everyone in the local community”

“Touch the daily lived experience of people in neighbourhoods.”

“Be warm and homely”

“Be welcoming and caring”

“Reach out; open our doors; communicate”

“Share faith and prayer with others who cannot go to church, or who have lost their faith and trust in the institutional church.”

“Respond to the needs of people, particularly the aged.”

1c We need to engage more effectively with our parishioners

“Get off your backsides and get to know more parishioners.”

“Priests get involved with the parishioners, get to know the neighbourhood”

“Homilies need to focus more on a persuasive call to follow Jesus. Theology in action.”

“Relevant homilies to the issues of the time important to lay people.”

“Explain what the liturgy and sacraments are all about.”

“Follow up on what the parish is actually doing. “

“Challenge us! It’s risky. Understand the people in the pews who don’t want to be challenged.”

2. What the ‘hierarchy’ needs to do in Australia

None of the responses focused specifically on the obvious issue of the Royal Commission and on church structure, culture and processes which must change to ensure there are no more victims of sexual abuse. No one should infer from this that our parish is not vitally interested in preventing sexual abuse. However, the responses dealt with this issue in more general terms, because sexual abuse is not the only issue that the Church must deal with.

One of our parishioners summarised our position with the following statement:

To maintain Saint Mary MacKillop’s determination of “never see a need without doing something about it”

Another parishioner has very strong feelings, which represents the views and feelings of some parishioners:

“I am angry! I am deeply offended by the institutional church and do not wish to ‘airbrush’ away its crimes or misdemeanours *because I believed in it and have been faithful to it all my life*. I am concerned that the current report is almost saying we are not so very unhappy with your performance guys, just a few changes needed and then business as usual, when in today’s world, if they worked in the private sphere, the hierarchy would be sacked, the board disbanded, an administrator appointed, and then the criminal investigations and prosecutions commenced. I don’t wish to be ‘throwing stones’ but there is such a long and vile history at this point (I am focusing on the last few decades only) that the good works and very great works that

the church has done – which are extensive and from which I have benefited – is now lost in the darkness of its misdeeds.

I am now questioning if I want to be part of the Catholic Church anymore. This is not a loss of faith declaration as I have a strong faith in Jesus, but rather a demand that the institution whip itself into shape and modernise itself, so that it actually reflects the commandment “love your neighbour as yourself”. We have a long way to go to get there. I want a Church that my children will attend!”

2a. Focus on the poor, lonely and marginalised. This is of paramount importance in the Plenary Council.

“Place the needs of poor, lonely and marginalised people at the centre of all Church activity.”

“When they enter the church -a strong welcoming group at the door! Welcome them, ask their names. Bring them to a cuppa after mass. Introduce them to others. These people are the HEART of our parishes. Sit with them down the street.”

2b. Create and promulgate an energising vision for the church.

“Live as Jesus asked us to live.”

“Take up the challenge of proclaiming Jesus more clearly and strongly in everyday life”

“Not so much by teaching language but by affirmation language. Affirming the domestic church spoken of by Vatican II and so much by Pope Francis. The witness given to the Gospel by parents loving, caring, nurturing their children. An incarnation theology affirmed! A forum for listening to how busy parents live the Gospel and how children and Teens live the Gospel in their homes. This needs to be affirmed by the Church.”

“Be more humble, less arrogant”

“Integrity, Authentic, Compassionate”

“Be more inclusive and compassionate; show more compassion to people estranged from the church”

“Be understanding and welcoming to people of other countries and other faiths; be united in our faith to withstand the challenges.”

“Be proud of the many cultures across our nation”.

“Be a spokesperson, acting as an intermediary between the secular and the sacred; take a stand on social issues”

“Be less judgmental; be kinder to each other”

“Go amongst the people; be more open; be seen and heard; sit with the people, use modern technology to listen to them and respond to their needs”

“Be less dogmatic and relate the gospel to everyday life”

“Give of ourselves – it’s all we have”

“Develop community in every parish – that is our mission”

“Look outward and reach out more; become more welcoming.”

“Transform the negatives”

“Stand up and be counted! Witness! Claim our faith!”

“Think about ways to change dramatically. Everything should be on the table (in the Plenary Council). Be prepared to challenge ‘Rome’.”

“The church show leadership in doing things about serious issues like global warming”

“Youth do the little things that will make changes, we can change the world!”

2c. Change the model of church

“Live more authentically as followers of Jesus; our model of church should be communities of disciples”

“Every single person needs to be involved in serving the poor. Get our hands dirty.”

“Resolve the conflict between what Jesus preached and the institutional church”

“A new model of church that works from the bottom-up; do what we should do, not just what the priests and bishops tell us. Bottom up leadership is heavily influenced by the example of the leaders.”

“The church in Australia *as an administrative organisation* needs to be more transparent, flexible and responsive to the needs of those it intends to serve rather than remaining entangled in archaic organisational structures, rules and regulations which ultimately distance and disengage it from the people...”

“Culture of male dominance needs to change. Remove an all-male hierarchy – the men have lost their way. They have gone down an unhealthy and wrong path.”

“Move from clericalism to a focus on Church as the People of God (Vatican 2).”

“Include women and laymen in governance structures and decision-making processes at every level; invigorate lay leadership.”

“More stability; don’t change priests so often; parish should have a say in who is assigned”

"Be more transparent in all aspects; share information openly"

"Be more tolerant of other faiths"

"Focus less on bricks and mortar and more on the people who are the church."

"Be a credible servant church, divesting itself from anything to do with power. Be on the margins of society. Be quiet and reflective"

"Listen to the ordinary people."

"Look at ourselves through the eyes of other people"

"Keep abreast of the special needs of youth, the elderly, and mental health issues"

"Return to and put into practice the key documents of Vatican II and the model of church as the People of God, i.e., all the baptised."

"The church should reflect the diversity of its local community."

"The Church should be welcoming to all people. We should not be judgemental. The Lord's mercy and compassion is open to all."

"Provide a refuge, an alternative to busyness"

"Interpret the secular world with eyes of faith"

"Build and give life to the local community; be seen as part of the social infrastructure"

"Be prepared to change!"

"The Church has to accept either female priests or married priests or the Church will surely die."

2d. The role of women needs to be rethought and changed. This issue is larger than 'married priests' and needs to be a major priority.

"Listen to the women. Sit down with them and ask them what they want. Without women there is no future for the church."

"Ordain female priests"

"Female priests and married clergy are critical changes. Make women equal partners in church governance."

"Doubling the number of priests would be a very good thing."

"Woman priests make sense. Do it!"

"Women would bring broader value. "

"Women are equal in our society."

2e. Focus on reigniting the faith of adult Catholics, and on religious education in Catholic schools

“The church needs to be reenergised! Many baptised Catholics have pulled away from the church. There is a dire need to re-educate Catholic adults about the faith.”

“Return to the spiritual development and pastoral care of people, and not focus on the non-spiritual aspects.”

“More spiritual development; challenge the people and help them become disciples of Christ; everyone learn how to pass on the faith.”

“Catholic schools are failing to provide good religious education and not giving students an understanding of what we believe and why. Make Catholic Education more relevant to the Church’s mission to evangelise.”

3. Themes about certain high visibility issues.

3a. Strong support for married priests.

“The idea that priests should be set aside is no longer helpful to the church.”

“(We need more) Priests who appear to happy in their vocation.”

“Allow Catholic priests to have a partner. The cause of the decrease in vocations is due to the role of priest being isolated from the community.”

“Optional celibacy”

3b. Marriage and Divorce

“Better marriage preparation and be more open to those with failed marriages.”

3c. The decline in the church’s influence

“The church is not seen as part of the social fabric as it once was. There needs to be a new strategy to reengage, to become more meaningful to the broader population.”

3d. Abortion

“Speak up more on the need to ban abortion, and the connection to justice.”

“Stand up more strongly against abortion”

3e. Catholics not inclusive

“Inclusive of all people into the church, rather than excluding”

“Relax rule in receiving communion; is being catholic is more important than being Christian?”

Appendix A -- Report from School Captains

Number of students participating -- 14. Only one of the students knew that her parents were members of our parish. The rest were uncertain. Their experience is that the school is their “church” and connection to the parish.

1. What are the different parts of the church in Australia? (Warm up)
 - Churches and cathedrals, chapels
 - Communities that surround them
 - Different beliefs and different churches for each religion, mosques, synagogues, etc
 - Unchurched people
 - Bishops, priests, nuns
 - Ordinary Catholics
 - Sacraments, services
 - Individual prayer
2. What do you like most at our parish?
 - Community is very nice
 - Our two priests are laid back
 - Parish involves itself in the community, Asylum group, Christmas carolling
 - Priests treat school children as special and ask us questions about the Gospel
3. What would you like to change at our parish, to make it better?
 - More activities that involve the broader community
 - Move outward, outreach
 - Less closed in, Catholics show their faith outside the church
 - Stronger bonds between school and church, closer cooperation with parishioners
 - Church building needs to be more inviting, lighter
 - Twin with another (international) parish and school, exchange ideas, share
 - Weave school subjects together with twin parish
 - Closer relationship with the other parish school, know school captains
 - Young people lead the relationship building between the parishes
4. What could our parish do to attract more young people?
 - Youth group
 - One special night where the young people would invite their friends and hold special services.
 - Hold a tour of our church and explain what it’s all about
 - Special events planned by young people
 - Children’s liturgy expanded, create art about the gospel
 - Make gospel messages more child friendly
 - Videos and multimedia, use screens to keep kids’ attention, not just words on the screens
 - LEGO Bible stories
5. What do you think the Holy Spirit is asking of the Church in Australia at this time?

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Almsgiving, more focus on the poor

Focus on needy people, people like refugees who don't have everything

The church show leadership in doing things about serious issues like global warming

Youth do the little things that will make changes, we can change the world!

Appendix 2 -- Small Group

Each person chose a topic from the list of topics in the Progress Report, Question 5

Take up the challenge 3

Live more authentically 5

Think about ways to change 4

Female priests and married clergy 5

Stand up and be counted 1

Be a Credible servant 9

The Group then chose 3 to discuss.

TOPIC 1 Be a credible servant church

- The conflict between what Jesus preached and the institutional church
- Be out there living what Jesus preached.
- Serving, following the Gospel, older people, asylum seekers
- Living more authentically
- Look at ourselves through the eyes of other people
- Not doing what we should do, not just what the priests and bishops tell us.
- Every single person needs to be involved in serving the poor. Get our hands dirty.
- Our young people do it but not under the umbrella of church.
- People modelling service.
- Protect our doctors. Understand the need.
- Get good Catholics in parliament.
- Priests get involved with the parishioners at the coal face, get to know the neighbourhood.
- Lay leadership in the parish council.
- Fight negativism by doing positive good works.

TOPIC 2 Take up the challenge of proclaiming Jesus more clearly; live more authentically as followers of Jesus

- Bottom up leadership is heavily influenced by the example of the leaders.
- Homilies need to focus more on a persuasive call to follow Jesus. Theology in action.
- Relevant issues to the issues of the time important to lay people.
- Explain what the liturgy and sacraments are all about.
- Follow up on what the parish is actually doing.
- Challenge us! It's risky. What about the people in the pews who don't want to be challenged?
- Regard for the diverse Christian responses to issues
- "Party line" and pastoral, loving approach.

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- Family role in this.
- School has key role in stimulating this.
- Church is boring to the young.
- Inclusive of all people in the church, rather than excluding.
- Relax rule in receiving communion; is being catholic is more important than being Christian?
- Do priests know it all?

TOPIC 3 Female priests and married clergy

- Doubling the number of priests would be a very good thing.
- Priests don't have a chance to really settle in and know the parishioners and community.
- Parish need to be trained differently; mature adults not teenagers who haven't lived. Get seminarians out into the parishes. They need to be people people.
- Woman priests make sense. Do it!
- Celibacy is too much of a burden; but would they be able to give 100% of their time?
- Women would bring broader value.
- Women are equal in our society.
- Married priests because celibacy is unnatural. Single priests don't get support. "Two for one."
- Let the red dresses go!
- Undress the bishops!

Plenary 2020

The Catholic Church in Australia will hold a Plenary Council in 2020. The last Plenary Council held in Australia was back in 1937. A Plenary Council is a formal gathering of all local churches in a country. It will be attended by bishops, clergy, religious and lay people and will seek to look where God is leading the Church in Australia. The agenda of the Council will be formed based on feedback received from local **"listening and dialogue"** sessions on the topic of where God is calling us. To date more than 40,000 voices have contributed to this phase of the three-year process.

The "listening and dialogue" phase continues up until 6 March 2019.

Our parish sessions held in November 2018 and February 2019 resulted in passionate and thoughtful discussions.

Here are the topics raised by our parishioners who attended the sessions.



Leadership & Governance within the Church

"Transparency in hierarchy, in accountability, in decision making – the church is not above the law- structures are too rigid – boys club false piety that alienates and is seen as deception."

"Lay people should play a greater role so that all power is not in the hierarchy."

"Fair distribution of wealth and advocacy for Justice – to equate to the Gospel message of Jesus - Love one another as I have loved you"



God is asking of us:

To be:

- Non-judgemental
- Respectful towards– divorced, same sex
- Inclusive
- Hopeful
- Relevant (to all age groups)
- Reach out
- Engage
- Greater voice – young, old , women
- Acceptance
- Love and support (eyes wide open in practical ways)
- Do something

The Priesthood

"Re- evaluate structures and teaching of priests for their psychological and emotional maturity."

Priests must be at least 5 years out of schooling before entering the seminary

Study for priests should occur at least 50% in co-ed open Universities"

"Optional celibacy – with a significant need for married priests."

Change is needed

- Mass – empty chairs why??
- Running of Catholic schools (catholic priest doesn't run the school)
- Pomp & pageantry (\$\$\$ around this!!)
- Songs at Mass
- How to teach R.E.
- To have a greater social voice – Refugees
- To be a force to reach out to others
- To bring children back to the Church
- Strip back to core messages of the Gospels - LOVE

Closer Connection to God and Prayer

“To trust in God, to develop a relationship with God, to show joyful witness to family and community by example.”

“Reconnecting to Jesus’ teaching and finding more relevant ways to share the gospel through both genders in leadership.”

“Renewed understanding of what is prayer – actions connecting us with God, not necessarily formal prayer.”

“God is asking us why have you forgotten? ‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.’

The Sexual Abuse Crisis

“Acknowledgement and removal of priests from priesthood for those found guilty of paedophilia – Bishops to take responsibility including at Vatican level - OWN the MISTAKES.”

“That church funds are not used to support the legal costs of paedophiles within the clergy.”

Acceptance & Acknowledgement

“We the members of the Church need to accept- take on board the hurt the Church has done – acknowledge....what has happened e.g. sexual abuse; injustices toward gay...divorced, then – we are sorry – what do we do now? Our sorrow seen by our actions e.g. selling Church property to properly compensate victims of sexual abuse.”

Climate

“Recognition of climate change and the urgency for real action- Advocacy and Awareness.”

Future Church

“The structure [the buildings] need to change – more spiritual hubs for daily gatherings.”

“The main church will be like a ‘fire station’ – it will act when needed e.g.: sacraments/ funerals /weddings.”

“Contemporise /modernise.”

Problems with Rules

- You can get married if.....
- You can get baptised if.....
- You can go to the catholic school if.....



Plenary Council 2020

Listen to what the Spirit is saying...

The role of Women in the Church

“Inclusive of women in leadership roles in the church, in decision making and with voting rights so that gender balance is significantly addressed.”

“Deaconate of women / priesthood for women.”

“No blocking of the language of women becoming priests/popes/ leadership as this blocks hope for change.”



A More Inclusive Church

“How do we reach / welcome all people to be in relationship with God and all people to feel they belong to our church?”

“More inclusive stance for marginalised – Divorced/ LGBT/ IVF/ Contraception/ mental illness/ elderly.”

“Gender fluidity and how it will be addressed within church and schools?”

Church as relevant to today’s world

“The structures from Rome down don’t seem to facilitate this.

Remove clerical hierarchies and add lay councils.”

To keep up to date on the progress of Plenary 2020, go to:

www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au

Submissions to Plenary Ccl. 2020

1. That we the Church, hierarchy and laity together, seriously seek to model our lives upon the humility shown by the Holy Family in the Stable at Bethlehem.
2. That we beg the Holy Spirit to deepen within all Catholics, whether committed or disillusioned, the realization that we need the Mass in our lives, perhaps now more than ever before.
3. That the Plenary Council demand that all Australian Catholic Archbishops resign forthwith, partly because they have shown again and again during the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse that they have been complicit in the criminality of paedophiles, have failed to provide any suggestion of leadership and have also failed to provide, so far as I can ascertain, a response to the report and recommendations of the Royal Commission. Failing such resignations, I submit that the Plenary Council demand all Australian Catholic Archbishops show cause publicly as to why they should not resign.
4. That the evil of clericalism must be eliminated, root and branch, from every level of the church and that one step towards achieving such a goal might be to start by banishing vestiges of power and superiority (or what are clearly seen by the laity as modern-day phylacteries - cf. Matthew 23:5) such as the mitre and the crozier. Furthermore, priests' and bishops' vestments should be greatly simplified and made credible for an era in which austerity, if genuinely displayed by the church, might just help to regain some of its integrity.
5. That a significant number of women should be ordained deacons forthwith and that nominations for that role be called for from amongst the congregations at Mass.
6. That communication from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) to the laity be improved enormously, so as to make readily available answers to questions such as the following:
 - (i) Which of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into child sexual abuse have been implemented by the ACBC?
 - (ii) How was the laity advised about those that have been implemented?
 - (iii) Has the ACBC written to Pope Francis requesting that he consider the Royal Commission's recommendation that he amend canon law so that a priest may report to the appropriate authorities instances of clerical sexual abuse he learns of in the confessional? If not, why not?

7. That the ACBC urgently request Pope Francis to convene an Ecumenical Council, perhaps at Assisi, to discuss the twin issues of power and sex in the Catholic Church.
8. That the Plenary Council take immediate steps to explore the possible ordination of men of proven character (*viri probati*) to the priesthood and make their discussions and findings publicly available.
9. That Opus Dei be banned from Australia, thus reducing its insidious influence on seminarians and young priests, seeking as it does to form them in rigid and judgemental views of catholicism such as prevailed in Melbourne in the 1950s.

Peter Hannan
Mordialloc.
(27.01.19).

My personal response – Plenary 2020 Listening & Dialogue – submitted online 28 February 2019

Berna Wake – Parish of St Louis de Montfort, Aspendale

I strongly believe God is asking us to make changes to how our Church is governed, by removing all clergy and lay people who have covered up sexual abuse over many decades. He is encouraging those of us who faithfully love Him to speak up and take action to put the Church into our own hands together with the priests, religious and lay people who have never been involved in any such atrocities and cover-ups. I believe God gave us the Royal Commission into Institutionalised Child Sex Abuse in Australia for this very reason. God is sad that so many people in positions of power within the Church have moved so far away from his teachings of love, empathy, inclusiveness, kindness, caring and forgiveness. He is imploring us to do everything we can to remember His teaching and make the changes required to achieve this.

I don't believe we have much future at all unless the Church is prepared to move in line with society's expectations, so I would like the Plenary Council to consider:

- Appointing female clergy
- Allowing clergy to have normal, loving, relationships (marriages and families)
- Opening up avenues for more lay people to share their time and talents in building the Church and Parishes
- Immediately removing (de-frocking) all members of the clergy guilty of covering up sexual abusers, of those who have committed and been found guilty of sexual abuse of minors, vulnerable people and all people who have suffered abuse
- Removing all the pomp and ceremony of the Church and its richness of golden statues, marble tabernacles, jewelled chalices etc and replace all of this with a more minimalist place of worship
- Review the hierarchical structure of Bishops, Archbishops, Cardinals etc. Adopt the leadership "structure" of truly Christ-like organisations such as Mother Theresa's Sisters of Charity
- Become a more inclusive church accepting all people from all walks of life
- Consider what the Church in Australia wants to stand for - take on a cause that can unify us all e.g. homelessness, poverty, indigenous issues, asylum seekers, the environment. Run a marketing campaign to fully communicate what it means to be a Catholic in Australia, underpinned by the cause (s) that we have chosen

I am so thankful to have two pastors who are the embodiment of Christ's Word. They truly understand His teachings and they demonstrate their willingness to model His behaviours. They are inspirational and I feel their pain (although unspoken) about the way the Church has dis-honoured not only Jesus but all of us who believe in Him. I am not the type of person to just turn a blind eye and hope the watershed issues will be addressed e.g. the abuse crisis; the lack of keeping in step with society; the out of touch with Christ, hierarchical structures and Church riches that are incompatible with helping those in need. I am very committed volunteering in our Parish but I want to do more and hope the Plenary Council, really does take into account what myself and others have expressed.

St Thomas the Apostle, Blackburn 3130

Plenary Council Submission

January 2019

Question 1. What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

Child abuse has highlighted a range of issues within the Catholic Church that need addressing. This goes right to the core of Church values and a need to understand child development resulting in a theology of the child. It also calls for the Church to look at itself and protect the rights of people, especially children, not those within its brotherhood who have caused this damage. It demands that Church inaction cease and policy reform begin. We need leaders of vision who are prepared to courageously implement radical change.

- For radical change that is measured, purposeful and better reflects the Gospel values.
- More open and transparent governance, accountability and oversight within the hierarchy of the clergy, that includes the addition of laity on these boards/groups/committees.
- We need to measure our success and our failures. Implementation of on-going processes of quality improvement within the Church.
- Greater support for priests in their noviciate. All priests to have monthly supervision as well as a mentor priest for all new priests in parishes. The implementation of a Centre for Excellence in Clerical Supervision be created and shared across all denominations. Better training for priests to understand parish life and engage with community. The option of marriage for those who find the commitment of celibacy too difficult. The human condition requires others for true fulfilment and fewer mental health issues.
- Mass is core but needs to be more youth friendly and open to greater cultural diversity and engagement of laity.
- Youth and their parents are the future of our Church. More is needed to attract and welcome them. Offer opportunities for involvement that are of interest to young people. Focus on music ministry. Learn from other denominations how and what they do to engage their young people. Support young parents to remain within the Church.
- Laity needs to be more involved in all aspects of the Church, especially on oversight boards and committees. Lay people on Church boards and in influential, higher level decision-making groups and leadership positions. Adult education to be offered and improved.
- Church needs to reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community and to do more to support refugees and migrants.
- We need women leaders (not just participation) to be included in all levels of leadership within the church hierarchy. Their contribution needs to be recognised with far more engagement of women in Church decision-making roles. We recommend the ordination of women as a positive way forward.
- Mission/Outreach/Social Justice: The Church speaks more publicly on these issues and operates as a moral compass in the community, influencing government and beyond. Local parishes to meet people where they are at, in their communities.
- Increase the opportunities for ecumenical encounters that reflects true dialogue and learnings from each other.
- Acknowledge the role of the sacraments in Church life and increase opportunities for the Third Rite of Reconciliation.
- See prayer as an important part of the life of Catholics. Learning how to mediate may assist people to develop a personal encounter with God.

Question 2. What questions do you have about the future of the Church in Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

- Change needs to start right at the top. Is there a willingness to deal with the issues listed above and how can this be done?
- How can we measure our success and failures?
- How does the Plenary Council plan to address the issues of governance and oversight?
- We seem to be in a holding position, when are we going to move forward with improved policies and procedures?
- Clericalism is seen as a profound problem within the clergy. How will this be addressed?
- There will be no Church if we don't start engaging young people. How do you propose to do this?
- Music ministry is an important aspect of Church participation. How can this ministry be used to connect with young people?
- Ecumenism is an important aspect of our lives. How do we plan to engage with other denominations and learn from them, especially in their engagement of young people?
- How can the church engage women, identifying their skills and utilising their talents? What are the impediments and when can women be ordained ministers?
- What is the role of Catholic schools in engaging young people with their Church?
- Could we consider holding once a month just one mass that all parishioners attend to create a sense of oneness and welcome to all?
- How can parishioners trust enough to involve their priest/s more in family life? What will you be doing to restore trust in our clergy?
- How can the impediments to priests being married be removed? This is already accepted with Anglican priests who convert to Catholicism and are married.
- We need to be more prepared to speak out on issues of social justice. How can this be implemented?
- There are many laity, with high level skills, wanting to participate more and offer their skills to their parish/church. The Church needs to garner these willing people and use their skills to its advantage. Why is this not happening?
- Older people feel lost without the penny catechism. Older rules and regulations seem to no longer be relevant. What does God now expect of them?
- When are we going to become more inclusive of all peoples – a home and a place of welcome. We have become too complicated and need to return to simplicity. How can encouraging open dialogue in small groups and communities be established?
- As we have grown and developed, becoming more powerful, we have lost focus on the little Church and our Gospel values. We need to go back to valuing the little Church. How can this be done?
- Local parishes need to be more missionary and evangelical. To leave their church building and go out to where the community support is needed. What support can the Plenary Council offer parishes to do this?
- What are we doing to welcome and accept the marginalised and the unacceptable: the divorced, the gay and lesbian community, the withdrawn and vulnerable?
- What can we do for the many who have walked away from their faith?

Question 3. Would you like to share your experience of faith or of the Church in Australia that has shaped you?

People in this group:

- Had a positive experience of their faith.
- Felt that the catechism and rules and regulations were a strong focus of their Catholic learning.
- Experienced pastoral care as an important aspect of their Church.
- Felt a sense of belonging and connectedness to their Church community
- Determined that priests were often part of their home life, particularly family celebrations and rituals.
- Were pleased to have received a Catholic education and many educated their children in Catholic schools.
- Felt that Vatican II brought many positive changes, including mass in English.
- Feel lately the Church has lost its way.
- Feel disconnected from the Church they felt they knew and the Church they are hearing about through the Royal Commission.
- Are concerned as to what the Church is doing to support the victims of child sexual abuse.
- Are concerned at the loss of people attending mass and the absence of young people in the Church.
- Feel that the arrival of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) has brought a new life back to our parish. Their heart charism is a strong positive experience in our lives.

The author's education was in Catholic primary and secondary schools. The Loreto and Sionian nuns who taught and encouraged her in leadership, led her to believe that as a woman she could do anything, and she has. She has been a nurse, a teacher, a psychologist, a business manager and a state manager of a community program and a married woman, who with her husband, raised 3 children. Without the gift of these special people, she may well have never had this success. She found community and belonging in her parish through youth clubs, social justice groups, sporting clubs and many other groups. She developed her moral compass from a Catholic perspective. She met her husband after mass, married in her church and their children went to the same primary and secondary schools as she had. They received their sacraments in this church and were married in this church. Her post schooling education was in state and Catholic hospitals, Catholic Education Institution and Catholic university. When their baby died, it was their Catholic friends, as well as their family, who supported them and their priests and service that gave them comfort when their son was buried. Their priests and religious have been there for them when they nursed and later buried their parents. The Church has been her life, an important guide as she grew and progressed through life. But now she feels a profound sense of shame that the Church that she loves so much, has been a source of such pain and anguish for so many young people, so much so that their whole lives have been damaged by the men who abused them. She is left with much doubt about the Church but still a strong belief in God and a hope that the Church will learn and change.

Additional:

(There is an area where additional information can be added if there is not enough space, word limit, to enable completing the submission.)

1. Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) came to our parish about 8 years ago. They have indeed done many things to make the church relevant in our times, including many of the points covered in our submission. We need to empower and support such orders within the hierarchy as well as local parish leadership to make it easier to make decisions on the ground and shape parish communities.
2. We cannot emphasise enough the importance of the developing a ministry to support all people -families and individuals, who have experienced child sex abuse within the Church.
3. Women need to be given more responsible roles within the Church. They need to be seen as leaders and be placed in positions of leadership within higher level positions and roles. They need to be given decision-making opportunities and to be listened to.
4. We need to be sensitive to the position of asylum seekers in Australia and speak loudly when they are used as political pawns. Nehru and Manus Island need to close and all asylum seekers brought to Australia. We are creating a deep pockets of mental health issues for these people who live in despair and have no hope.
5. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the opportunities that Ecumenism creates. We have much to learn from other Churches, especially, about engaging and retaining young people.
6. Opportunity for laity to be more involved with leading the church, particularly at local/parish level and in positions of leadership within the Church hierarchy. This needs to be supported by more structured and funded on-going adult education.

1. Servant Leadership

We believe God is calling us to be a humble Church with a leadership structure that is truly one of servant leadership, without any sign of clericalism.

We believe Church leadership must embrace the equality of both men and women – with an openness to the ordination of married men to the priesthood and women (at least) to the diaconate.

We believe the Australian Church would be better served by the Plenary Council's decision-making body being open to a greater number of non-clerical members.

2. The Language of Liturgy and Sacraments

We believe that God's call to humility must be reflected in the language we use in our worship. Our strong recommendation is that the Australian Church adopt the 1998 translation of the Roman Missal, because the language of the 2011 translation seems pompous and convoluted. Also that we adopt the *Revised New Jerusalem Bible* for a new Australian lectionary. Regarding the Sacraments, we recommend that the Third Rite of Reconciliation be re-introduced.

3. Open the Windows to the World

We believe God is calling us to look outward to the modern world with the face of Mercy. As a servant Church, this is seen by our spirit of justice for the poor, for asylum seekers and refugees, and for the earth itself. If we take *Laudato Si* seriously, we will adopt practical measures to protect our earth because it is always the poor who are most affected by climate change.

OUR LADY of the PINES PARISH, DONVALE, MELBOURNE

PLENARY COUNCIL SUBMISSION

This Plenary Council Submission is based on five Listening and Dialogue Sessions held at Our Lady of the Pines Parish, Donvale, Melbourne on Monday 12 November 2018 at 9.15 am and 7.30 pm, Tuesday 13 November 2018 at 9.15 am and 7.30 pm and Sunday 17 February 2019 at 10.30 am.

All members of the parish and school community were invited to participate in the Listening and Dialogue Sessions. The community was also asked to encourage their family and friends, particularly those who no longer attend Mass on a regular basis, to participate in a Listening and Dialogue Session, emphasising they would be most welcome at our parish or attend in their local parish. The responses covered a broad spectrum. There were those who said they would not come to a Listening and Dialogue Sessions because they had nothing to contribute. But they were still encourage to attend and have a chat with friends as everyone's point of view was important and valid. In discussions it became evident that these people had been told by the clergy for 60 or more years that their views were not welcome nor relevant; they simply had to obey. What became known over the decades as the expected form of lay participation in the Church as 'pay, pray and obey'. There were those who saw a complete failure in leadership and governance by the bishops and said – "What is the point, nothing significant will change." At the other end of the spectrum there was the vast majority of the community who are keen to see OUR Church regain its position of trust and relevance in our spiritual lives and in the broader society. A sacred place with a strong focus on justice and respect for all. The majority of this group considered that significant change was necessary before trust and relevance could be re-established. The Church needs to move from an obsession with sin and rules which has made the institutional church a cruel unwelcoming place, to a place of love. Jesus said – "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another"; and in the early Church, a pagan observation of Christians was - "See how they love one another." Members of our community considered that we are blessed to be part of such a loving, supportive community. However, such Christian love was not evident in the institutional church.

The majority of the participants in the Listening and Dialogue Sessions held at Our Lady of the Pines are active Catholics, who attend Mass every Sunday, who are active members of a vibrant Catholic community and many are actively involved in Catholic social services agencies.

Consideration was given to preparing an executive summary or collating common themes to reduce the level of duplication in the submission. However, it is valuable for the Plenary Council Facilitation Team to see the common themes that have emerged from the various Listening and Dialogue Sessions.

The sessions began with a quiet reflection. The participants were advised that their personal thoughts were critical and each person's views are valid, even if they differ from the other participants. The sessions were seen as an opportunity to share ideas and experiences. For some people, this brought up some painful experiences, which were treated with care, respect and Christ-like love. For such people the Listening and Dialogue Sessions were an important part of their healing process, following years of hurt caused to them by their church. The discussions traversed the experiences of all the participants, including their hopes and aspirations for our church and what is typical of the broader Catholic communities around Australia. It was recognised that our parish is blessed to have a Christ-like parish priest and community.

The process for the Listening and Dialogue Sessions focused on the key questions that the bishops of Australia have asked us to address. There was some level of overlap between the responses to the first and the second question posed by the bishops.

WHAT DO YOU THINK GOD IS ASKING OF US IN AUSTRALIA AT THIS TIME?

The first question was seen as a little abstract by some of the participants and - *What do we want our church to look like in 2025? or What would Jesus want His church to look like in 2025?* – were discussed. None of the participants sought change in the Church because it would be convenient to them, but recognised the presence of the Holy Spirit in the process.

The responses by the participants to the first question of - *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?* - were as follows:

To bring about a more Christ-like Church.

To establish trust and relevance in God's Church.

To bring about substantial change in the Church in order that the institutional church ceases to be a blocker between the people and God, and becomes a bridge to carry the people to God.

To establish credibility in order that God's Church is an effective advocate for social justice in Australia.

To be a more encompassing church. To get back to how Jesus was on earth and welcome everyone. Don't be so judgemental. Too many man made laws. Be more welcoming. If people want to become Catholic, don't put laws in the way – Jesus would have wanted them to be baptised.

To be more inclusive. What would Jesus do?

To be more tolerant, open and welcoming.

'What would Jesus do?' He would reach out to those who are often made 'outcasts' by the many rules we now have.

We live in a time characterised by declining trust in society's major institutions – governments, banks, and our Church. God, through society generally – all His people - appears to be calling on the leadership of such institutions to accept responsibility for their many failures; to take corrective action; and to ensure such failures never occur again. Although some such action has been taken in our Church, much more needs to be done. God is calling us back to be a Christian Church, not an institution which has lost sight of the core teachings of Jesus.

We also live in a time characterised by a growing divide between the rich and the poor. Our Church responds to this through the many Catholic social service agencies which have become seen as the 'real church'.

We are blessed to have a Christ-like parish priest. But as we move from the parish level up the hierarchy, the Church changes from 'the home of Christian values' to an institution indistinguishable from other failed institutions.

To be authentically representative of the truth of the teachings of Jesus. That will genuinely show His encompassing love for all people of the world without exception.

To be loving. Respectful of differences. To be tolerant. To be accepting and forgiving. To be more Christ-like. Less focused on man-made rules. Less ostentation eg dress of the bishops and the hierarchy. To be open and appealing to our youth – open to all in fact. To be less staid and

conservative. To be joyful and provide services. Welcoming. Rejuvenation and rebirth. To be open to the Holy Spirit. To promote our Catholic bodies like Caritas and Vinnies.

Less institutional. Less emphasis on rules and regulations, and on punishment for not following them. Welcoming. Inclusive. Non-judgemental. Put others first. More concerned about how we treat each other than following rules. Uplifting liturgies – language we can all relate to. Not lose our traditions but move with the times. How do we attract people back? People feel disconnected. More lay people helpers - priests don't have time to visit their community. Greater role for women in leading.

That we recognise that the Catholic Church, the institution and the faith, is dying as an institution – by most criteria is irrelevant to society. That God's church model the teachings of Jesus, that the Church truly reflect the Faith. That the people of the church accept responsibility for the mission of the Church. That all Catholics model the teachings of Jesus in responding to the challenges of society. That lay people insist on a Christ-like church and demand accountability from church leaders. That women be treated equally in the Church. That bishops listen to all the people of God. That the Church provide Christ inspired leadership on social issues. That the bishops of the Church listen carefully to what Jesus said to the Pharisees.

More participation and attendance in Church mass and events.

More relevance to current times, be more progressive.

Get the younger generations to participate.

More bible study of the old and new testament to get a better understanding of the bible and God / Jesus' teachings.

Acceptance of all – eg divorcees, people in same-sex relationships – a non-judgmental church.

Make mass more welcoming – less pompous and ceremonial.

To make the church more palatable for young people.

Cancel individual Confessions.

Excommunicate priests, bishops etc who have been convicted of paedophilia.

Married priests.

Female priests.

To be relevant to our community (all people).

To engage deeper with young people under 30 and young families – ie Priests to become missionaries in their community / parish.

Less emphasis on sin and more forgiveness – ie Divorce.

Less Ritual. Less Rules.

Women priests.

Celibacy out – not compulsory. Reduction in Clericalism.

Reintroduce Reconciliation of the 3rd Rite.

Greater role for women – ie Deacons.

Remove the Bishops' mitre.

Weddings outside church buildings.

Women ordained to the priesthood – Having been involved in the ecumenical movement, I believe it works very well in other churches.

The church needs to be more inclusive of all people. Judgements should not be made on people.

The Church has got to become more relevant.

Priests should be allowed to marry.

Confession should not be compulsory.

Parish priests should have contact with children at school – regularly – If only addressing a school assembly and having fun and positive time there.

Parishioners to be taught from the Bible and to openly discuss.

A place of acceptance and trust.

Reaching out to all, and not judging.

A Church that openly practices what it preaches, and provides help and refuge.

Increasing role for women – Not only cleaning, flowers, office work ext, but teaching, ministerial roles, on committees, and right throughout the church.

Developing paid roles / positions for either males or females, to support priests in a ministry role (eg Uniting Church).

Acceptance of LGBTI – These are all normal human beings whose needs are the same as ours. They require understanding and acceptance. We need to change our attitudes to stop the needless persecution of these people. We need to halt discrimination in our workplaces, schools and churches. We need to develop an acceptance of diversity. We need to provide acceptance for both students and teachers, and reduce the burden they carry. Provide councillors where needed.

That the church continues to be relevant to all ages.

That it embraces all people with love, understanding and compassion.

That it is inclusive so that no groups feel unwelcome despite belonging to a minority group within society.

That the sacraments that have always been an integral part of the church have all remained and are regularly observed.

That the rigidity of some of the rules have been studied and in some cases changed to address in a sympathetic way the needs of its members.

That despite the challenges presented by the non-believers our faith in God remains steadfast.

God is asking us to be more like Jesus: humble, accepting of all, loving, observant, forgiving, welcoming, warm, comforting, non-judgemental, empathetic, not feeling superior to anyone else. He wants us to love Him and to show this by loving one another.

Inclusiveness is fundamental to Christianity, not just a traditional guideline.

Learning from other faiths in process and life values.

Identifying what is important in our faith journey.

Reflecting 'social standards' with Catholic Church guidelines / practices / rules.

Recognition of women.

Accountability of Church hierarchy.

Lay input and recognition.

Church hierarchy to listen to the lay people of the Church.

Moral judgements must be contemporary but in line with Christian values.

Christian Values – back to basics.

Review of traditions / decisions / Church law / doctrine formed by men over the centuries – Are they in line with the message of Jesus?

God is asking us to be humble, generous and loving.

God would want a church which values each person who wants to join.

God would want everyone to be fully appreciated for who they are.

God would have a church where each person's gifts are identified, nurtured and nourished into ministries to serve the mission the Church has been given.

Jesus wants a church which is free of barriers, encourages and welcomes all.

God would have a church where lay leadership is encouraged and promoted for all members of the laity.

God would want us to protect the most vulnerable in our society - the poor, the homeless, the lonely, refugees, those suffering mental health issues ++. We are the largest humanitarian organisation in the world. Many Catholics see Catholic Social Services as 'the true church' today. If a commercial agency says – 'We cannot take They are too great a risk' or a government agency says – 'We do not have the facilities to take Many Catholic agencies, inspired by the teachings of Jesus, would say – '..... must have been meant for us.' But many people do not trust our motives. We do this because Jesus showed human kind a new way to live. A way that looks after all in the society. We can measure how civilised a society is by looking at how that society treats its most vulnerable. But many people believe we do this for evangelisation (a terrible word) reasons, and we do this for power, control and for money. We need a paradigm shift in how we communicate, how we deal with people, how and why we act to reflect the love of Jesus to all humanity.

The church should not be driven by man-made rules.

There is a lack of understanding by the people concerning the rules.

There is a lack of understanding of the people by priests and bishops.

Mass should be a connection between the people and God, and between the people.

"See how these Christians love one another." We see this in our parish, but not in the broader church.

What is a Catholic? Is it all the baptised or just those who attend Mass each week?

Missing Mass on a Sunday is a mortal sin. Will the bishops lift this pressure on families? Is it ok for people to try but ok if they do not make it every week.

Why to parents send their children to Catholic schools if they are not going to go to Mass?

There was a greater level of commitment to the Church by school parents in our day.

Should Catholic schools issue strict guidelines re Mass attendance?

Catholic schools should at least push the message to attend Mass.

People put their children's sport as a higher priority than taking them to Mass on a Sunday.

But what came first – the chicken or the egg? Junior sport only became popular on Sunday mornings when a large proportion of the population stopped coming to church because of the loss of Christian values by the clergy.

Values are more important than dogma.

Most Catholic school parents accept the values but reject the practise.

We should not judge people for missing Mass.

Both parents are working today and this is having a significant impact on families.

Evangelising is failing as it does not reach out to all people.

Religious teachings in the schools should be based on the Gospels.

School children should be required to present at school something that they learnt at Mass.

The school bulletin should include – 'We would love you to come to Mass'.

Many of our churches are run by Pharisees. They are too rules based and there is too much clericalism. Priests are not God. That is why parents are not bringing their children to Mass.

The Children's Liturgy on Sunday at Our Lady of the Pines is wonderful. If the children could tell their friends at school how good it is, more would come.

Many parishes engage the school in RCIA where the question is asked of prospective parents about their faith journey.

Our priest puts a lot of effort into his homily. But most priests are not good at giving homilies.

Homilies should be about spiritual guidance, not doctrinal instruction.

When will the bishops reintroduce homily training into the seminaries, like that which was once provided by Bob Santamaria – a lay person.

Homilies should be relevant to life today.

Women must be ordained. We have passed the day when women were regarded as 'not clean'. The men denied Jesus and most of the men deserted Jesus at the time of his great suffering and death.

Jesus allowed a woman to be the first person to know of His resurrection and she told the Good News to the men.

Will the bishops allow special days to celebrate LGBTI people?

Unlikely, they won't even let us have a proper celebration of the life of our deceased.

We should have a prayer at Mass for the success of the Plenary Council.

There is a lack of understanding of the scriptures by the laity.

It is up to us [the laity] to educate ourselves in a Christ-guided manner.

I do not come to Mass because there is a rule.

WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA THAT YOU WOULD LIKE THE PLENARY COUNCIL TO CONSIDER?

Moving then to the second question posed by the bishops – *What questions do you have about the future of the church in Australia that you would like the plenary council to consider?* It was clear from the vast majority of the participants that considerable change is necessary in our Church to take us from where we are today to what God is asking of us in Australia at this time.

The practical steps to implement the necessary changes were seen as follows:

Women must be empowered in the Church.

The laity generally must be included in decision-making.

New structures advising the bishops.

Bishops reporting on goals – successes and failures.

The selection of bishops must be informed by the laity.

Parish priests must reject autocratic approaches.

Pastoral Councils at dioceses and parish levels.

Transparency in church affairs.

Strategic plans for all levels of Church administration.

Return of the Third Rite of Reconciliation.

Community reflections.

The governance standards and practices in our Church are well below the basic minimum that is expected of any Australian corporate entity. Lay people should be listened to, not treated as being disloyal.

Some bishops are unfairly tainted by the poor pastoral care, governance and leaderships of their predecessors. But current bishops should respond to all letters and emails from the laity. The laity have a great deal to offer the church. These Listening and Dialogue Sessions are great, but generally the bishops just shut down the laity. Thank God for good parish priests.

We need to be more evangelical. Look at what the Pentecostal churches do – they have large numbers.

I am not sure how, but we need to get the young ones staying with the church and attending Mass.

We should be asking the young generation the question of why they have drifted away and what we can do to get them to participate again – not just teenagers, but people in their 30s and 40s.

Perhaps we need to 'market' ourselves better – for instance the Salvation Army is always in the paper when there are disasters. Catholic agencies do a great job too but they are not talked about eg Caritas v Red Cross.

Encourage more married deacons – preferably married priests.

Include women in the hierarchy of the church so they can participate in decision making.

More lay participation may help as we have so many foreign born priests now and they may not relate to the young people being from a different culture. Not quite sure what the 'lay look' should be at this stage but they need to be encouraged to help build up the numbers coming to Mass and participate in the sacraments.

Jesus wasn't on a pedestal – the priests need to be more of the people – take away the administrative tasks from priests and the financial responsibilities – they should only be doing pastoral work.

Find a way to bring more people to weekend mass because, unless they study God's word at home, this is the only way to know Jesus' message – the Good News.

Women in the church have a great deal to offer and I would like to see them more prominent, not necessarily ordained.

Why can't we have married priests?

Reach out to young people with a positive message about the teachings of Jesus.

The hierarchy (princes) of the church have to be more in touch with the people, both mature and young.

Married priests would have a more realistic idea of everyday life and its difficulties, as would women priests.

I have great hopes in the leadership of Pope Francis. He is a humble man who does seem to be 'more like Jesus'.

By removing from the hierarchy of the church all that is not of Jesus teachings, including all resistance to reaching out to all people who are struggling with conventional Catholic teachings and canon law, focusing strictly on pastoral care.

Abolish compulsory celibacy.

Combine all Christian churches.

Married priests.

Female bishops and priests.

Less hierarchical decisions and instructions.

Eliminate many man-made rules.

Go back to basics – Love your God and Love your Neighbour.

Appeal to our youth – less boring services.

Promote our wonderful good works.

Listen to the lay people.

Open the church up – transparency.

Change the way we choose our Pope and our cardinals.

Better public relations – promote our social justice activities more.

Better use of women – women priests.

Married priests will connect better with their community.

Embrace all – eg divorcees and gay people.

More about the people than the rules.

Review the current rules of the church and discard old ones that are no longer relevant.

Adopt new rules of the church to make the church more relevant to current times.
Get more lay men and women involved in the organisation and the Mass.
Bible studies and teach the relevance to current times. Start from younger age and through to adult years.

The rigidity of quite a few rules need to be reviewed and in simple terms made more embracing of the needs of the people.
Members of the church should not feel that they are continually being judged for any reason – eg their attendance at Mass, their relationships, their sexuality, criminal history etc.
Whatever their situation they are welcome and the more they reach out the more they will find comfort and healing.

Rather than being blinded by too many rules and expectations, we need to open our eyes and ears to be aware of those around us and be sensitive to their needs.
We need to care for ourselves and for others. In doing this we are sensing God.
The church may need to relax some of their rules so people who are not following all those rules can participate in the Catholic faith without feeling like a hypocrite (ie feeling guilty).
Education via families and schools that God will embrace everyone who reaches out to Him.

Adult faith education as a means of renewal of our faith needs to be on the agenda for the Plenary Council. Archdiocese of Los Angeles in the United States made good progress with this challenge some years ago.

Why do bishops think the media is to blame for the current state of the church? If there had not been numerous failures by priests and bishops, the media would have nothing to write about.

Are changes really likely to occur after this Plenary Council?
Are women going to have a greater role in our church?
Will changes be made in regards to divorce, contraception, gender inclusiveness, sexual orientation?
How can we include all?

The Church needs to be somewhere that people can turn to in times of stress, without judgement.
There have been double standards where evil actions of some in our hierarchy have been swept under the carpet, whilst many people who are just living their lives are made to feel alienated because of divorce, contraception or sexual orientation.
We must reach out to as many communities as possible.
We must take on the mantle of care as the number of clergy declines.
Should those who attend our Mass who are Christians be allowed to receive Communion?

Introduce a Parish Charter (the current guidelines from the Archdiocese for Parish Pastoral Councils are very basic). A de-emphasis on Clericalism and ordained priesthood who focus on preaching, teaching and sacraments and shift parish administration to the laity - Are changes to Canon Law required?

Will the Church remove the concept of ontological? Change canon law which generally says that at the time a priest is ordained he is elevated to a higher level of closeness to God which intentionally separates him in authority and spirituality from the people he is ordained to serve.

Will the Church become tougher on only allow children into Catholic schools who have an involvement with the church / parish.

We should not throw out the rules, but study how and why the rules were developed.
But the application of the rules has been cruel and harmful, lacking Christ's love.

Why does every parish in Australia not have an active RCIA program?
When will the Theology of RCIA become a required unit of study for seminarians?

It is time the Church hierarchy began to listen intently to the people of God.
Priests and the hierarchy need to realise that they are the servants of God, and that priests, bishops, cardinals and the pope are no more sacred than any other baptised Christian.
Clericalism was judged by the Australian Royal Commission to be a major factor contributing to child sex abuse by priests.
Priests, bishops and cardinals believe themselves to be superior to the laity and the lay people looked up to them with the same opinion. This gave them an enormous power base. The Church has thrived on this for centuries.
Priests in the seminaries need to be taught to be partners in the mission, not dictators.

Women should be seen as equals with rights to Church leadership, servant ministry and presiders at the Eucharist – in other words, women priests. It is time for the patriarchal superiority to be abandoned.
Married priests should be permitted to servant ministry and presiders at the Eucharist. Anglican priests who join the Catholic faith are allowed this privilege, so what is the difference.
Rules and regulations made up by man need to be revisited and those that exclude lay people, women, divorced people, LGBT people, people of other faiths, those in irregular relationships etc. need to be abolished.

The Church must cleanse itself of the ongoing evil of systemic sexual abuse. This abuse starts often in the seminaries and then has been supported and protected by most of the church's structures and leadership. So, every Bishop, Archbishop or Cardinal who has covered up abuse, moved abusive priests around or not reported abuse MUST be stood down from their role and never be promoted again into any leadership positions; and every single paedophile priest MUST be defrocked within a year.
There must be an immediate end to the mandatory celibate priesthood with the aim of married priests as the norm.
Ordination of women priests must start straight away.
A total new focus on young people.
A complete rewrite of the Mass to remove all dated, exclusive terminology and to bring it into the modern world.
A much more loving and kinder approach to ensuring inclusion of those currently excluded or feeling excluded: divorced, gay etc.

A number of young priests coming out of the seminary today have extremely conservative views. Young priests will need to change some of their views rapidly if the Church is to recover. Many of the men studying for the priesthood understand that the ontological change that occurs at ordination elevates them to a higher level of closeness with God which intentionally separates them in authority and spirituality from the people they are ordained to serve. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of the ontological change that occurs at ordination. Holy Orders places one in another position in the community, not a better or more privileged place, but a place from which one is called to spend one's life in service of the people of God.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHARE A STORY ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF FAITH OR OF THE CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA THAT HAS SHAPED YOU?

The third question posed by the bishops was - *Would you like to share a story about your experience of faith or of the Church in Australia that has shaped you?* It was not possible in the Listening and Dialogue Sessions to capture all the personal stories the bishops have invited us to submit. But what is really important, is for the bishops to understand WHY Catholics feel the way they do. What have been the experiences in the lives of Catholic that have brought them to suggest the changes above?

Accordingly, all participants were asked to go on-line and submit their personal stories to the Plenary Council via the website. Participants were also asked to encourage their family and friends, particularly those who no longer attend Mass on a regular basis, to submit their personal stories.

But an interesting reflection at one of our Listening and Dialogue Sessions was – “Catholics do not tell / share good news stories – personal stories – miracles in their lives. Other Christians share their stories, but we have been taught to ‘listen and say nothing’.”

One of the most moving personal stories to come out in one of our Listening and Dialogue Sessions came from a lady who was divorced in 1994. She did not initiate the divorce, did not want the divorce and could not prevent the divorce. In 1975 Australian legislation introduced a ‘no fault’ policy regarding divorce. This meant the only requirement for divorce is the ‘irretrievable breakdown’ of the marriage which is proven by the husband and wife being separated for twelve months. The partner does not have to agree to the separation. Because of the Church’s teachings on marriage and divorce, she felt like an outsider and could not receive the Eucharist for many years. Under canon law, she should not have been banned from the Eucharist unless she took a partner or remarried in a civil ceremony – which she had and has not done. This illustrates the inconsistency in the application of canon law around the world and the stigma placed on divorced people – a cruel act on a good, innocent Catholic person.

SURVEY RESPONSES

The community was also asked to encourage their family and friends, particularly those who no longer attend Mass on a regular basis, to participate by attending a Listening and Dialogue Session or making a personal submission on line. However, over time, a number of people said that their family and friends found the first question difficult – *“How can we know what is in the mind of God?”*

This brought about some interesting discussions delving more deeply into the spiritual lives of individuals. Most Australian Catholics have known at least one priest in the life who is / was a saintly man they feel blessed to have known. But in the main, the experience of many Australian Catholics has been that the clergy have been a blocker, a barrier between them and God. This is possibly at the core of why very few Catholics in Australia now attend Confession / Reconciliation and only about 10% of Australian Catholics attend Mass on a regular basis. The People of God have been looking, over many years, to the priests and bishops as a bridge to God, but this is not what they found. Today, they are no longer looking for a relationship with God through an intermediary, but looking for a direct, personal relationship with God.

For those who were not comfortable completing the online submission direct to the Plenary Council, we developed an online survey by the use of the tool - Survey Monkey. The responses to this survey were as follows:

Q1: I can see a clear reflection of Jesus in the institutional church

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
7.69%	34.62%	7.69%	19.23%	30.77%

Q2: I can see a clear reflection of Jesus in our local parish / school community

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
40.00%	44.00%	16.00%	0%	0%

Q3: The majority of Catholics in Australia no longer attend Mass on a regular basis because we now live in a more secular society

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
19.24%	38.46%	7.69%	19.23%	15.38%

Q4: The majority of Catholics in Australia no longer attend Mass on a regular basis because they have lost trust in the church

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
48.00%	24.00%	16.00%	8.00%	4.00%

Q5: The majority of Catholics in Australia no longer attend Mass on a regular basis because the church does not appear relevant to their spiritual lives

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
38.46%	34.62%	15.38%	7.69%	3.85%

Q6: For the church to be more relevant to the spiritual lives of Catholics in Australia, we need to move back to a more pre-Vatican II church

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
0%	4.00%	20.00%	16.00%	60.00%

Q7: For the church to be more relevant to the spiritual lives of Catholics in Australia, we need to move away from an overwhelming focus on sin to a focus on love

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
56.00%	40.00%	0%	4.00%	0%

Q8: For the church to be more relevant to the spiritual lives of Catholics in Australia, we need major changes – much less clericalism, married priests, more leadership and ministry roles for women, a more loving welcome to people who feel rejected by the church

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
76.93%	15.38%	0%	7.69%	0%

Q9: If Jesus was to walk the earth today, what would He think of His church? What would Jesus want His church to look like today?

A9: He would be saddened by the unintended consequences of the institutionalised church structure.

He would be truly disappointed in the church today. He would like it to be more open, less regimented. Welcoming to all and less about attending Sunday mass and more about how we treat others, practise kindness, forgiveness and respect to all.

Inclusive, diverse, humble, self-aware.

He would start a new church. We have come full circle in the last 2,000 years and ended up where we started – with the people being suppressed by modern day Pharisees.

Jesus does walk amongst us every day and I'm sure he is most disappointed that people judge too much and have lost faith because of the media.

He would think it was boring. To draw the younger generation in, we need the traditional messages to be preached in a not so serious way. A lot of guilt is placed on Catholics which needs to be addressed. Jesus, I think, would like his church to be a loving, happy place for all to come to and be accepted.

Lost focus on people's everyday lives and how we each contribute in our own special way. Welcoming; simplified language; simple messages - church is not a biblical course, we can do a course at university for that.

More inclusive of all people. Instead of the church treating some people (such as LGBT people) as hellish sinners. Jesus was even nice to lepers so he would totally be for lots of people who have been declared by the institution as sinners.

I think he would want us to be examples of His attributes - forgiving, loving, compassionate and prayerful, to follow the beatitudes.

Jesus would want to see more genuine acceptance and inclusivity. He would want a church that involved itself powerfully in standing up for the marginalised, not a church that played a role in maintaining those margins. Jesus would want faith to be discussed and explored in more relevant contexts that appreciated the realities of the time and place within which he was ministering.

More inclusion of all peoples.

Today Jesus would think his church has lost its way a little bit, but that there is hope in the younger generation to rectify that. Jesus understands that the church must evolve with societal needs and changes but that the core issues in the world have not changed significantly, therefore he would hope that his church continued to display actions of preserving human dignity and supporting those in need.

Relaxed, forgiving, loving.

Jesus would not be happy. His church doesn't reflect his teachings.

You stuffed it up!! The values are worth keeping but the institution, rules, sin and punishment is all wrong. It could look like mindfulness, meditation and Buddhism without the reincarnation.

Jesus would think the church hierarchy has lost its way. He would want a more inclusive compassionate church that accepts all sinners.

He would like all religions to unite and live in peace with each other.

More compassionate, less judgemental and acceptance of everyone on an equal level - whatever your gender, sexuality, race etc.

Jesus would be saddened at the way his church has been destroyed because mankind has failed to obey the 10 ten commandments and his 2 great laws, plus what his clergy have done to vulnerable people in society which in turn has broken their soul and spirit. But most of all the loss of trust in his church and the greed for money. Today his church should be always full and have all mankind obey his commandments and laws and care for the wonderful world that he gave us, that we - mankind the worst form of living beings - are destroying.

Less judgemental, and more welcoming, with many fewer hierarchy. Hierarchy of the church living in the "real world" and in touch with ordinary people.

Jesus would not recognise the institution that has evolved in His name with the church He created. Jesus would want the leaders of His church to follow His teachings through a servant leadership model.

He would want it to be a more welcoming, inclusive church. Non-judgemental and for everyone to be treated equally.

Q10: How do we get from where we are today to where Jesus would like us to be?

A10: By listening to those who left and understanding why

I actually don't know. It is such a gigantic gap, like the Grand Canyon, so I guess it is one small step in the right direction at a time

Radical self-responsibility by the leaders of the Church.

Asset sales to provide ongoing support / foundation ala Gates Foundation.

Just have more faith, don't let media turn you away from the church.

By reviewing the way mass is preached and keeping to the same traditional messages. Survey the younger generation to get their ideas of what it will take to get them back in church.

Encourage activities that bring people together. Community and friendships are built and common goals and values.

Love.

I would like to see the church embrace the idea of married priests as well and women priests. I would like the church to welcome and accept homosexuals rather than perpetuating more hatred and fear. Priests need to be held accountable for criminal actions, particularly when sexual abuse has been proven.

The church needs to be a place that embodies the image of truth, hope and love. As Christians, we need to remain true to our values and as a community, we will all strive for the same goal, to be a religion that is followed not frowned upon.

Priests' marriage.

Overhaul the whole church and bring it into line with the modern world.

I don't think it is possible with the current structure or trying to teach children fairy tales. The kids grow up and realise these stories are all made up.

By the church hierarchy evaluating the current rules and making the necessary changes to make the church more inclusive.

Pray for unity, tolerance and for Him to show us the way.

Get rid of the current version of church leadership - they are no different to corrupt, power hungry politicians - we need complete diversity.

To be more concerned about how we treat others, rather than strict rules and regulations.

Do the right things mentioned in Q9 above that Jesus asked us to do in the first place, 2000 years ago.

Listening to the laity through this process is a great start. But women must be appointed to leadership roles throughout the church, at the Vatican and all the way down. The vow of obedience for ordained clergy must not be seen as 'say nothing and do as you are told'. Pope Francis has started to turn the church back towards Jesus. But the clergy who are in opposition to him must be persuaded to support our Pope.

The bishops must start to lead the church, beginning with introducing proper governance structures and processes, accepting that bishops, like all leaders, have an accountability / responsibility back to the people they lead.

Bishops must stop labelling lay people who express concern about OUR Church as disloyal. "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men [and women] to do nothing." Edmund Burke and John F Kennedy.

When will the bishops apologise to Catholics who were married by a paedophile, had their children baptised by a paedophile and their children received First Holy Communion from a paedophile? There can have been go greater heresy in the last 2,000 years than allowing a paedophile to preside at the Holy Eucharist.

Bishops should respond to letters and emails from the laity. Failure to do so is a major failing in leadership.

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SUBMIT THE THOUGHTS OF OUR CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

Thank you for this opportunity. The fact that the bishops are prepared to undertake this process of asking the laity for their input is a significant step forward. We trust that this submission will make a contribution towards the development of the agenda for the Plenary Council 2020 and to shape the future of our Church in Australia.

God bless

Hi Fr Gerry

Further to my earlier email, it is my observation from the Plenary Council submissions that I have seen that there is a strong call for significant change in the Church, and that the change needs to commence now. I would suggest that the focus of the Joint Submission from Parishes be on Action Steps. With many of the Action Steps which are required being matters that do not require Vatican approval, or Plenary Council approval. My first thoughts on this are as follows:

1) Matters that can be addressed immediately by each individual Australian Bishops where there is currently inconsistency.

Eg. Bring Jesus back into central focus in the Church. Many of the Bishops are obsessed by sin and display little or no love for humanity.

Adoption of a leadership style that recognises that all good leaders have an accountability and transparency responsibility to the people they lead. Many of the Bishops see that they are only accountable to the Pope and to God, and this has made them ineffective leaders.

Develop governance structures, processes and frameworks that will lead to good decision-making. This is significantly missing at the present time in many archdioceses and dioceses.

Consultors and other advisory groups to the Bishops to include women and lay people who are not employees of the Church - establish Diocesan Pastoral Councils.

Each archdiocese and diocese in Australia to have a Pastoral Plan developed through dialogue with the 'Faithful'.

Seminarians to be taught that the ontological change that occurs at ordination does not create a master - servant relationship with the laity. The teachings of Jesus concerning servant leadership appear to have been lost.

Appoint women into senior leadership roles. Many archdioceses and dioceses have already done this. The problem is, very few of the local laity know of such appointments. Improve communications with the laity.

Make special occasions like a Requiem Mass for a loved one, a Mass that celebrates a life lived with Jesus including personal details of the loved one, not just a plain vanilla impersonal service.

2) Matters that do not require approval from the Vatican, but in relation to which the Australian Bishops may wish to have uniformity.

Eg. Marriage annulment / *Decree of nullity* which (I understand) are currently very painful and costly, and what is approved and what is rejected can (I understand) vary considerably around the world.

3) Matters which will require the approval of the Vatican.

Eg. The ordination of women priests.

The ordination of women deacons.

A uniform approach to married priests, not just favouring former Anglican priests.

Garry Nolan
30 March 2019

What is God asking us?

Context:

Vatican 2 spoke of the 'signs of the times' we noted

Falling Mass attendance

Attendees – often older people

Global Warming causing climate change and consequences of this

Refugee crisis and responses to this

We asked what as Catholics are we asked to do, religion is not just for Sundays it should affect the rest of our lives, we should be responsible global citizens making a humane response to the problems of our world. We stay in the Church asking what is working, what is not, what do we keep what discard. We want to be relevant and inclusive. We want to be responsive to our local setting. It was noted that at the same time as the Western Caucasian church is in decline, many Asian communities flourish.

In small groups we prayed and discerned- the following are notes of the types of things we considered and where we believe the Spirit is calling us as a Church:

Spirituality, liturgy, sacraments and faith:

- Evolve / nurture our faith
- Love, backed up with mercy and forgiveness. Mercy is gentle as silence
- The power of prayer, get back to our roots
- The Church was built on charity and that story has been forgotten
- Reconciliation and retreats (sacraments), spiritual direction (RCIA)
- To praise, worship God and know why
- To witness and spread the Good News
- The values of and teachings of Jesus are relevant today in our society
- Singing in the church makes the Holy Mass alive
- How do we celebrate our nature / planet new symbols in the Church i.e. nature and our environment in our Liturgy
- Liturgical prayer for the cosmos – How to take care of our planet
- Make the language relevant, simplify and modernise;
- allow participation in preparation of prayers, eg children to formulate Eucharistic prayer;
- General Absolution to be allowed.
- with regard to hymns it was suggested some pre Vatican 2 ones be banned

Priesthood and ordination

- Rules about marriage for Priests should change
- Allow priests to marry, who understand family and can relate
- Open leadership and priesthood in the church to women,
- make celibacy optional,
- welcome back former priests,
- rid the church of clericalism, close the divide between priests and people
- Inclusion such as women deacon

Inclusion:

- Need more women in positions
- More involved laity
- Acceptance of divorced, gay, loving acceptance of everyone. Non-judgmental
- Very male dominated
- Women involved in the ministry
- For the plenary council to consider inclusiveness, i.e. divorcee, members of LBTGBTIQ -including lay people (women specially) to attend the Plenary Council at the discernment process
- change the rules about who may not participate in communion – make all truly welcome- divorcees, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people, non-Catholics etc.

Governance:

- Need to move away from clericism and change the current hierarchy of the church
- Need more women in positions
- Decision-making bodies reflection of the Church at all levels
- When will the Catholic Church start to allow women to participate in the governance of the Church?
- For the Plenary Council to consider women as deacons / part of the governance of the church including as part of the central governance in Rome

Outreach and justice:

- Engaging with youth in their way
- To walk the talk, follow the teaching of Laudato Si
- Needs of our environment
- Working from conservatism into a new cosmological view of understanding that we are earth people, matters and spirit (all is sacred, all is Holy, all is one) – New consciousness is passing

Communication:

- Like to pass on faith, we need to be getting the story out, PR selling the message.
- Overhaul media, social media, connecting with Catholics
- We have to keep it relevant and support priests / clergy/ lay people by telling good stories.
- Updates on what is happening in parish, welcome packs
- The message we want to get out is love, mercy, forgiveness

Use of resources/stewardship

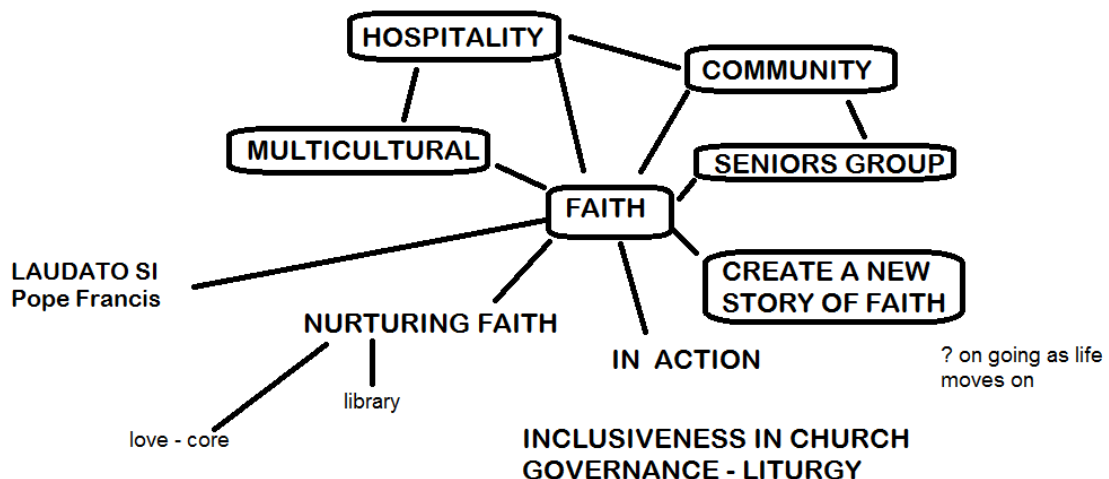
- Forging links / bridges with other parishes – interfaith as well. Sharing speakers, resources.
- Library where we can nurture our faith
- Participation in Leadership- Parish Councils
- To start a small group to contribute to nurture each other

Mindful of transient, and those who cannot drive at night
 They are already other groups unable to do a day activity
 Suggestion – Saturday; To have a get together to nurture each other

Direction:

- Let go of the past
- To see things differently and to rebuild our love for each other
- Create a new story in our faith journey
- Move beyond the abuse – reinvent ourselves, be clear about our vision and who we are
- How do we help the people who concentrate on looking at the past to look at what lies ahead- the future?
- Reassessing criteria of a healthy church, some markers out date e.g. church attendance, number of vocations, RCIA
- Rules are man-made and may be changed eg ordination of women and see above re rules for reception of Communion.
- Rules do not make sense to young people. They exclude people yet the message of Christ is inclusive – man made hypocrisy not Christ made.
- In keeping with our knowledge of evolution, that we are still in evolution, consider teaching on original sin, Adam and Eve story. Our liturgical prayers may need revision. RE teachers give students room to question and challenge Church rules. Our schools should also be inclusive of all.
-

A diagram: Faith is at the Centre of it all.



Introduction

The concept and implementation of the Plenary Council 2020 is to be applauded but on my part with some wariness that history will repeat itself in that the laity will not be given the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way to the concepts presented for discussion and to the decision making process. If this is to be the case clerics, both priests and bishops, will remain as is, in ultimate control of a system of clericalism.

In this submission I intend to consider the process of the Plenary Council, the absolute and important need for change within the Church not only in Australia but also internationally, and a number of issues that need consideration, discussion and meaningful change.

The Process

To date all members of our church community, through parishes or individually, have had opportunity to contribute to the 'Listening and Dialogue' phase. In the following 'Listening and Discernment' phase it seems that participation of the laity will be more limited to membership of working groups and small local groups. This is following the decision of the key themes for discussion. It is suggested that these key themes be presented to the laity as a whole so that all who wish to agree or disagree with these themes can do so.

Membership of working groups should comprise predominantly lay representatives as should small local groups. Nor should the final decision making group comprise solely priests and bishops but also largely lay members of our communities. It should be noted that during all stages lay representation should comprise women as well as men perhaps in greater numbers than men as the majority of church attendees tends to be women.

Issues for consideration

- Clericalism
- Role of the Laity
- Role of Women
- Environment
- Social Justice
- Community
- Sacraments
- Liturgy

Clericalism

Or the role of the clergy

Throughout my life and parish experiences, I have noted changes in the practice of priesthood on the levels of personality and the institution. There are those priests who are more personable than others and who reach out to their communities with respect, kindness and caring where as others are more reticent in reaching out and tend to be more administrative and less pastoral.

Surely, if we learn and live by the life of Jesus and that of the early Christians the role of the priest is pastoral, giving emotional and spiritual support and gentle guidance to the people of the community for whom he or she has responsibility. The role involves looking after or caring rather than teaching and living as Jesus would have us live by example. For example, in schools there are both teachers who facilitate learning and pastoral care staff who look after the personal needs of students.

Further within our parishes the role of priest often includes administrative responsibilities such as controlling finance, building maintenance and repairs, new building works and gardening. Surely tasks such as these can be performed by competent and relevantly skilled members of the community so that the priest can focus on the pastoral and spiritual aspects of his/her role.

Who are the clergy, I ask? Priests in the Catholic tradition are and have been unmarried men only. The Church as I have experienced it has been a patriarchal society with women performing such roles as decorating the altar, cleaning the church, cooking for the priests and in more recent times teaching in our schools and assisting in pastoral care.

In addition to changing the practised role of the priest consideration needs to be given to who can become priest – women and married men as in other Christian traditions.

Role of the laity

In these times of change and with the decreasing number of priests in Australia the laity could, should and in many instances desires to play a more active role in our communities according to their knowledge, skills and abilities. The role of the laity can cover a wide gamut of areas from the more basic to the more skilled, for example, from maintenance and care of the physical buildings and grounds to pastoral care to giving the Eucharist to becoming deacons taking on a more spiritual caring role. A lay person could take on a leadership role within a parish to the extent that the priest is only needed to perform the sacraments and to provide guidance to lay leaders across more than one parish.

Role of women

Women within our communities often play a vital caring role which I see could very easily be expanded to include that of deacons or ordained priests. In our changing times I believe this should be given very serious consideration with recommendation being given to Pope Francis.

Environment

God has given to us a beautiful world. Each week a group from our parish walks along different trails often through bushland or semi bushland located reasonably close to our capital city. It is in these areas that we can see and admire God's creation of trees, flowers, a river, creeks, birds and some of our native animals. But also, on these walks we see evidence of man's lack of care for, and even destruction, of this beauty with which we are so blessed and privileged to have been given. As community of God surely, we need to be active in caring for our world and in advocating that others, from individuals to governments, also take on an active role in ensuring that actions that will harm our world are not continued or implemented. We need to strongly advocate that actions that are affecting climate change are reversed, for example, our dependence on coal fired energy.

Let us as God's people actively care for the world he has given us and encourage others to do follow the pathway of care.

Social Justice

As follows of Jesus who cared for the sick, the poor, the lonely and the rejected in living as he showed us to live it is our role and responsibility to come to know the vulnerable in our communities and to find ways to offer them love and support. How do we offer support to the sick? the socially isolated? the poor? the unemployed? the homeless? In our parishes do we have unused buildings that we could offer the homeless? Let us in our communities become more active in caring for the needs of others.

Beyond our local communities there are many who also need support often in ways that are as basic as survival. In countries around the world there are many without food, clean water, safe and sturdy shelter, adequate medical care and education. There are those in our own country who are seeking asylum and permanent residency who are in need of our support by advocating on their behalf so that they will be permitted to stay, to be allowed to gain employment while they are here or at least be provided with a liveable allowance. Those so cruelly incarcerated on Nauru and Manus Island should be given

permission and support to share our country and supported to live reasonable lives when here. They are God's people.

Community

Not only within the Catholic Church but in society generally as we have become increasingly materialistic our sense of community has decreased. In our neighbourhoods children are rarely seen playing together in or on the street, often people living next door to each other do not speak, criticism of others especially those who are different is far too common.

As within the broader community likewise within God's church the sense of the other has been to a large degree lost. Many attend weekly Mass then walk out the door not to return or speak to any fellow Mass goers until the following week. Our large churches and sometimes large yet these days dwindling congregations lack any sense of community and few take opportunities that are offered to be or form community. Small groups where individuals can gather to share thoughts, ideas, life experiences, a meal and prayer can begin to replicate the early Christians by growing to be more caring and supportive of each other. Today's church needs to become like the early Christian communities in attitude towards others and in practice.

Sacraments

In general, the practice of the sacraments would best be according to the needs of local communities and individuals.

Baptism can be given across all ages witnessed by the whole community or much smaller groups.

Reconciliation is currently introduced to children at about age 8 – it is preferable that this sacrament be first received at an older age when the difference between right and wrong be better understood and choices more deliberately and knowingly made.

Many have stopped receiving this sacrament and are more likely to do so if the 3rd rite was reintroduced.

Confirmation, as it is the sacrament through which we affirm the promises made for us at Baptism, would be best received at an age when the individual has the maturity to more fully understand the commitment that is being made.

The **Anointing of the Sick** is still viewed by many as a sacrament for the dying rather than a sacrament of healing. For this reason, the sacrament needs to be more fully explained to the broader community.

Liturgy and spirituality

Given that the numbers at Sunday Masses are declining and those who are attending are becoming increasingly older parishes need to consider the ages and needs of their communities and present liturgy in an engaging and age appropriate way. Many would appreciate liturgy being presented in a more vibrant and lively way where the laity are engaged in a meaningful way.

Opportunities for members of our community to develop spiritually would best be presented in different ways and at different times so as to fulfil the needs and wants of greater numbers. For example, evenings often do not suit older people as they no longer are able to or like to go out at night.

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) begun 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. 443¹ 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.

¹ “§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 21st 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

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