

Sense of the Faithful Newsletter 31 May 2021

What we have been up to

It has been a while, October, 2020, since our last newsletter. We are now a committee of seven members from six parishes in Melbourne and regional Victoria. It was decided towards the end of last year to redesign the Sense of the Faithful website. We wanted to change the website's passive focus on providing information to a more active role of engagement. This required not only setting up the website to make it possible to exchange views on key issues. It also has required identifying the key issues likely to get a discussion going.

Our focus has been not only on the forthcoming Plenary Council (PC) but also beyond that event. No matter what actually occurs at the PC, we are also seeking to foster a process of reflective preparation, leading to a renewal of our communal Catholic life from the parish upwards. See, for example, our recent webinar on parish lay leadership (on page 2 below).

We initially came together to organise a meeting of 30 parishes from Melbourne with the aim of producing a joint parish statement of key issues we wanted the PC to address. With the feedback we received from that meeting and further discussion in individual parishes, 26 parishes finally endorsed the [Joint Parish Statement](#) on 23 May 2019.

Another reason for the delay between newsletters was the time we needed to analyse the long-anticipated Working Document for the PC called *Continuing the Journey*. This document was released in February this year. As we note in our joint assessment, for any meeting, big or small, the specification of the issues to be addressed and their expression in an agenda are crucial steps. The process of identifying the key issues and setting the agenda for the Australia Plenary Council has, to date, been far from clear.

Our assessment of the failure of the Working Document to say which issues should be given priority in the PC discussions can be found in [The Key Issues for the Plenary Council - Beyond the Working Document](#).

Seeking your contribution to a debate on the key issues for the Plenary Council

We are seeking contributions from you and others involved in the Church and concerned about its future. These contributions can focus on either the set of key issues or on particular issues for the PC. We believe that many beneficial changes could be made at the PC, without approval required from the Vatican.

We welcome your comments on key issues and on priority setting across issues in the first place. Then we want to encourage a discussion individually on the four issues that we have decided to focus on initially (see also the relevant web pages):

[revitalising parishes,](#)

[promoting the status and power of women in the Church,](#)

[recognising and supporting indigenous communities in national life and in the Church,](#) and

[protecting and restoring the earth, based on Francis' encyclical Laudato Si.](#)

We would like the debate to start with our discussion starter, already noted above: [The Key Issues for the Plenary Council - Beyond the Working Document](#).

Rules of Engagement

We want to ensure that the contributions offered are more than mere short comments, such as Twitter offers. We also want contributions that avoid strong assertions that lack clear evidence

for the claims made or attribute motives without evidence. Nor should contributions make references to individuals, either in positive or negative ways. We want to prevent the dangers of being open to all comers (ie trolls) by asking contributors to show they have a link to a parish. In the light of these considerations, we have set the following rules for accepting contributions.

1. A contribution should be between 400 and 1,000 words to ensure the issue raised is given a decent treatment.
2. We ask contributors to identify themselves and to demonstrate in some way that they have a link to a parish.
3. Contributions referring to particular persons or collectives (e. g. the bishops, the laity) must always be respectful.
4. Claims made about the behaviour and or motivations of particular persons or collectives, must be backed by evidence available in the public realm.

If as a subscriber, you think these rules need changing or modifying, please send me an email, outlining your reaction and a proposed change.

Webinar on parish lay leadership

As many of you will know from taking part, we had a good discussion of the issues around parish lay leaders through Zoom on 5 May. We had 77 registrations for the event, many with more than one participant.

We drew on the experiences of two lay leaders from the long-established (early 1990s) Lay Parish Leaders team in the Archdiocese of Wellington. We also discussed the proposal from St Kevin's Lower Templestowe for a Lay Ecclesial Leader for their parish with the retirement of their PP.

We are keen to have a detailed discussion of the importance of lay parish leaders in the future life of the Church. The key issue is what roles can lay leaders take on and what are the conditions needed to make it work. This is especially so for those of us in the Melbourne Archdiocese with the [just announced plans](#) to set up a framework to reduce 210 parishes to between 50 and 60 'Missions' over the next five years.

Here is a recording of the webinar on Parish Revitalisation - Parish Lay Leaders in Wellington NZ. Please pass it onto others who may be interested.

Meeting Recording:

<https://tinyurl.com/37ms4hny>

Access Passcode: SoF5May21#

Please spread the word

We have 115 on our subscribers' email list now. So with the date of the PC fast approaching, and new developments on the ground in Melbourne parishes, we hope the new website and further webinars will be of interest to a greater number of subscribers.