



TOWARDS THE SECOND ASSEMBLY

A WORKING DOCUMENT FOR MEMBERS

28 FEBRUARY 2022

Preface

On 3 October last year, we gathered as the Members of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia for our First General Assembly and began the task that has been entrusted to us: “to gather the People of God in Australia in a process of listening and dialogue in order to discern the providential guidance of the Holy Spirit concerning the mission of the Church in Australia in the 21st century.”¹

Over the course of a week, we prayed, talked, listened and worked together. We carried with us the hearts, faith and prayers of the People of God across Australia who had prayed, talked, listened and worked together to enable the Church to arrive at the point of commencing the celebration of the Plenary Council.

We began the First Assembly by drawing on the Scriptures, the *Instrumentum Laboris*, and the six thematic discernment papers, and as we worked, the fruits of our prayerful discernment began to emerge.

Following the First Assembly, the discerned outcomes presented by the small groups were brought together with contributions from individual Members and published as the “Fruits” of the First General Assembly: *First Assembly Proposals from Small Groups and Individual Members* (December 2021).

Over December and January, four writing groups established by the Drafting Committee drew together theological advisors (*periti*) of the Council and a number of Members to progress further the work of discernment.

This document is the product of their collaboration and is now offered to the Members of the Plenary Council for discernment and response. It is the next step in the process we are undertaking together of preparing resolutions for the Second Assembly of the Plenary Council. It draws primarily on the ‘Fruits’ of the First Assembly’s discernment, discussion and contributions, as published in the *First Assembly Proposals* and gathered into four broad areas in the subsequent *Thematic Focuses* document. It shows further movement of the Spirit and is very much a work in progress, emerging

¹ *Statutes and Regulatory Norms*, 1.

from discussion, reflection, shared prayer and collaborative writing; hence, it moves forward ideas from the earlier documents, gently reshaping or clarifying them. There are four sections to the document, each developed by a separate writing group, who were asked to prepare scriptural and theological background for each focus and offer possibilities for our consideration as we move towards the Second Assembly.

The responsibility for preparing and shaping the finalised propositions that will be the focus of the Second General Assembly belongs first of all to the Members of the Plenary Council. During the month of March, all Members are asked to use the accompanying resources to reflect on these papers and if possible to join your fellow Members in a spiritual conversation. After this, please record a written response for the Drafting Committee by 4 April 2022. This will be the essential resource as the ideas and content in this paper continue to be reshaped. Input received after 4 April will not be able to be utilised by the Drafting Committee in this process.

Coordination of the overall preparation for the Second General Assembly is the responsibility of the Plenary Council Steering Committee, which is very aware that significant work remains to be done before we arrive at possible resolutions for the Second Assembly. The feedback and input arising from each Member's discernment over the coming month is a critical part of this work. Important contributions will also be made by various committees and advisors of the Plenary Council in consolidating and reviewing the various ideas, and in further articulating the Scriptural, ecclesiological and theological foundations and rationale.

The Steering Committee distributes this working document to all Members with trust and confidence in the Holy Spirit. Together, we look forward to the fruits of Members' discernment and know that despite not yet being physically assembled, we are united by faith and our commitment to the Spirit-led work of the Plenary Council.

Bishop Shane Mackinlay

Vice-President of the Plenary Council

Thematic Focus A: A Deeper Communion Enriched by Diversity (Participation)

Context and Theological Background

The First Assembly of the Plenary Council called for a deeper communion in the Church in Australia. The diversity of the Church in Australia mirrors the diversity of the Australian nation. Each responds to the revelatory encounter between the Holy Trinity and those who seek communion with each other.

Communion

The Second Vatican Council said of the Church that it “is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). The Council reminded us that the Church not only has its origins in God, but also points to God. The God of Christian faith is a communion of persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has been urged to strengthen its practice of the New Testament vision of communion, in which we are united in a bond of love in Jesus Christ. Through Baptism, believers are drawn into the divine communion and “come to share in the divine nature” (*Dei Verbum*, 2). Communion is the lifeblood of the children of God. Communion witnesses to the depths of Christ’s inclusion for all people who accept his generous and merciful invitation to the life of the Gospel. It is experienced in two ways: our personal self with the risen Lord; and our shared life with other baptised disciples.

Diversity

Diversity is an indispensable element of “communion”. According to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council: “Far from being an obstacle to the Church's unity, a certain diversity of customs and observances only adds to her splendour, and is of great help in carrying out her mission ...” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 16). The Church rejoices in diversity.

Scripture makes known that communion depends upon dialogue. From the very early days of the Church, diversity emerged in the establishment of a remarkable, counter-cultural communion (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13). From Pentecost to our present day, the faith preached by the Church has taken root in the cultures of the world and finds expression in those cultures and in dialogue between cultures. As Pope Francis observes, “Patience and trust are called for in such dialogue, permitting individuals, families and communities to hand on the values of their own culture and welcome the good that comes from others’ experiences.” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 134)

Communion and Diversity in the Church in Australia

The Christian mission, at its heart, celebrates diversity, does not shirk from it, and invites all people in their differences to worship and work together on the path of conversion to the heart and mind of God: “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.” (1 Corinthians 14:26)

Australia is an ancient land blessed with the world’s oldest living culture. In the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders told us:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and

customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from ‘time immemorial’, and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.²

When Pope John Paul II addressed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at Alice Springs in 1986, he said the Gospel “always and everywhere” uplifts and enriches cultures:

That Gospel now invites you to become, through and through, Aboriginal Christians. It meets your deepest desires. You do not have to be people divided into two parts, as though an Aboriginal had to borrow the faith and life of Christianity, like a hat or a pair of shoes, from someone else who owns them. Jesus calls you to accept his words and his values into your own culture. To develop in this way will make you more than ever truly Aboriginal.³

Having affirmed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christians in their identity, he espoused their place in the life of the Church: “The Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others”.⁴

Historically, the Church’s diversity is seen in the variety of ancient patriarchal Churches – eastern and western – which have their own liturgical forms, their own theological and spiritual heritage, and their own discipline (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 23). These Churches are a vibrant part of the Catholic Church in Australia and a lively witness to baptismal faith. In addition, other communities with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds make up the Catholic Church in Australia.

God’s plan embraces the peoples of the world and the whole of creation (Cf. Eph 1:10). Friendly encounter and fellowship with the baptised of all Christian Churches and communities, and with people of other religions and of no religion, contributes to the realisation of God’s plan. Together, we seek to build a just and harmonious society.

Care for communion recognises the need to work for reconciliation. Care for communion is the way we live as the kingdom of God, the way we live the Gospel of God. As we care for communion, we are “like a sacrament” or a sign and instrument of union with God and the unity of the whole human race. We strive to live according to Christ’s desire that “all may be One as the Father and the Son are one” (John 17: 21, 23). This is the time to be a sign in our nation and in the world that God’s gift of communion is possible and life-giving.

A1 Heed the Uluru Statement from the Heart and respond to NATSICC’s recommendations and receive and act upon the five recommendations outlined in the NATSICC Submission

At the first assembly of the Plenary Council we were invited to study and learn with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters as they continue their synodal journey to and from the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, and take action to continue resolving the “unfinished business” of reconciliation in this country.⁵

² <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/>

³ John Paul II, *Address to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Blatherskite Park*, Alice Springs, 29 November 1986

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 22.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council submitted to the Plenary Council five recommendations, “in the hope that the Catholic Church in Australia will more resemble the Church that Jesus Christ wants her to be in relation to Australia’s first people.” Consideration and implementation of these recommendations could move dioceses, parishes and Catholic organisations toward a more effective model of best practice when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

NATSICC drew Plenary Council members’ attention to St Paul’s entreaties that Christians “welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Romans 15:7) and “You are no longer to be treated as foreigners in your own land, for you are fellow citizens with the Holy people of God” (Ephesians 2:19). The recommendations foster communion and diversity, particularly by moving toward the realisation of reconciliation in everyday life of the Church in Australia.

NATSICC Recommendations⁶

1. Developing the knowledge of Clergy, Religious and Lay workers in the Catholic Church on the Culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to enable more effective and appropriate ministry.
2. Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics to undertake formation training and ensuring that existing retreats and courses are culturally appropriate.
3. Use symbols and rituals in a Catholic liturgical context to facilitate a welcoming environment for Indigenous peoples. Catholic organisations should seek and provide pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to provide perspectives and input into publications, programs and statements that affect them.
4. Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which a Church, School, Parish or organisation stands, in a prominent and appropriate manner. Encourage verbal acknowledgement prior to meetings and Mass.
5. Unearth and discover the genius and gifts that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people possess through inclusion on committees, boards and decision-making bodies.

A2 Each of the Churches recognises its patrimony and each works to foster and understand those heritages. Through its own uniqueness, each Church can then contribute to the missionary activity of the Church.

The Second Vatican Council declared: “The Catholic Church holds in high esteem the institutions, liturgical rites, ecclesiastical traditions and the established standards of the Christian life of the Eastern Churches, for in them, distinguished as they are for their venerable antiquity, there remains conspicuous the tradition that has been handed down from the Apostles through the Fathers...”⁷ By preserving their ancient liturgical, disciplinary and spiritual traditions, the Eastern Churches offer witness to the diversity in unity which adds to the beauty of Christ's Church. As part of the Catholic family, the Eastern Churches can offer unique gifts in the areas of liturgy and spirituality.

In Australia the Eastern Churches provide a vibrancy to complement the Church in proclamation of the Christian message. The Church, East and West, must each strive to understand, respect, include

⁶ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 22.

⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 1.

and preserve the rich liturgical and spiritual patrimony of the other. Through this mutual love, the Church “remains open to every culture, every spirit, and every form of organisation compatible with the unity of faith and love”.⁸

Proposals⁹

The Church in Australia promote the diverse patrimony of the Churches and in particular promote and preserve Eastern tradition and spirituality:

1. In formation of teachers
2. In the religious education curricula of Catholic schools, including diocesan, independent, religious and PJP schools
3. In university and institutions of Catholic higher education
4. By including representations of Eastern Catholics, including those without an Ordinary or diocese, in whole Church gatherings.

A3 That dioceses, parishes and organisations in the service of the Church devise instruments that care for the communion of the Church, fostering unity in daily practice.

Plenary Council submissions and proposals highlighted the need for ongoing formation of Catholics, as well as ways to facilitate deeper forms of communion. Proposals at the First Assembly included calls for research into what local, national and international programs for parish renewal have or have not worked. This proposal includes commissioning such research, and at the same time finding forums for resources that will help dioceses, parishes and other communities within the Church to share rich experiences.

1. Carry out research into how dioceses, parishes and organisations in the service of the Church are successfully fostering unity among a diverse body of the faithful.¹⁰
2. Make resources available for a variety of opportunities for shared prayer, engaging with the diverse spiritual needs of communities, thereby fostering spiritual conversation and deeper communion. To enrich the prayer lives of all, make a range of resources and opportunities available, including Liturgy of the Hours, *lectio divina*, Adoration, Rosary, and other practices that tap into the rhythm of the liturgical year.¹¹
3. Pay special attention to the need for all to be invited into formation as a life-long journey of faith, through the study of Scripture and in the sacramental life of the Church.¹²
4. Develop resources for small groups and other parish bodies, and which aim to foster missionary disciples, represent well the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Catholic community, and provide means of engaging with those diverse communities.

⁸ Archbishop Joseph Tawil, *The Courage to be Ourselves*, 1970 Christmas Pastoral Letter.

⁹ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 49–50, 87.

¹⁰ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 70.

¹¹ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 36, 71–72; *Instrumentum Laboris*, 140.

¹² Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 37.

5. Parish councils take particular care for the cultural and linguistic diversity of their parish communities, ensuring that this diversity finds expression both in the Eucharistic liturgy and in parish life generally. Parish forums may be a useful instrument for this purpose.¹³
6. Undertake initiatives that support the various ways in which all can respond to the “universal call to holiness”, including:
 - (a) Establish a marriage catechumenate, according to the stages laid out in Chapter 6 of *Amoris Laetitia*, so that married couples can experience accompaniment of a faith community before and during marriage.¹⁴
 - (b) Call for a year of prayer for vocations, to foster a shared understanding of the diverse charisms among religious congregations.¹⁵
 - (c) Provide gathering opportunities for those living the single life to ensure their rich contribution to the Church’s mission is recognised and celebrated.¹⁶
 - (d) Go out to the peripheries, within and beyond parishes, to create opportunities for those who may be overlooked, including those who are widowed or orphaned, those with a disability, those who are divorced and remarried, those who feel they are not accepted because of their sexuality or gender identity, and all those who experience marginalisation.¹⁷
7. Any formation programs promoted and designed for different levels of leadership ensure that:
 - (a) the diversity of the Catholic community is explicitly recognised;
 - (b) those programs provide means of understanding, including and celebrating the different spiritual and devotional traditions of our communion; and
 - (c) programs be available to all members of our shared communion.

A4 Communities in the local Church, according to their circumstances, engage with all people of good will, including Christians and people of other religions in giving witness to peace and justice.

In caring for communion, the Catholic Church in Australia acknowledges its particular responsibility to care for the communion of the whole Christian Church. Different regions and areas of Australia will meet other Christians and people of other religions in different ways. Through encounter and dialogue, Christians from different Churches and communities continue to deepen the communion they share, so that they might reflect the communion that is God’s plan. These recommendations seek to deepen the sense of promise declared each Easter Vigil, that all those of good will might be unified.

1. With fellow Christians, working together to bring Christ’s love to local communities through shared prayer and fellowship and local outreach projects;

¹³ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 68.

¹⁴ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 12, 54, 56.

¹⁵ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 60–61.

¹⁶ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 56.

¹⁷ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 29–30, 77–78.

2. With the Jewish people, forming a contemporary response to and implementation of *Nostra Aetate* for Australia;
3. With Islamic communities, affirming commonly held values and promoting these together wherever possible;
4. Working with those of good will who do not believe in Christ, to affirm the dignity of all human persons.

Thematic Focus B Ecclesial Leadership and Governance

Growing as Disciples and Servants of the Gospel

Context and Theological Background

The call to discipleship is integral to the Gospel, and so to the Church. Disciples are those who have heard and responded to God's invitation to follow Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit calls together the community of disciples, the Church. The abiding gift of God's Spirit nurtures equality and mutuality within the ecclesial community (Mark 9:33–34), reflecting God's trinitarian life, which forms and sustains the Church. This same grace stirs the ecclesial community to participate actively and generously in the wider society. In this way, the Church embodies the in-breaking reign of God that transforms human history. The Church is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, work for justice and peace, and exhibit the commitment to the compassion and reconciliation that flow from grace. To fulfil these tasks faithfully, all the baptised must ensure that the centrality of Christ and openness to the Holy Spirit is what gives their community its specific nature.

This grounding in Christ is to characterise prayer and worship in the Church, as well as the ecclesial community's structures, priorities for action and mechanisms for enacting these priorities. Faithfulness to Christ depends on, and so is inseparable from, openness to the grace of the Holy Spirit, who "will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13), leading disciples to the fullness of life in Christ. The Second Vatican Council crystallised what is particular about the ecclesial community when it described the Church as "the visible sacrament" of Jesus Christ (*Lumen Gentium*, 9). As the unique expression of the Holy Spirit's grace at work in humanity, the Church is to be "the salt of the earth and the light of the world" (*Ad Gentes*, 1).

Transparency to the Spirit forms a community that is humble, healing and merciful. Such a Church, one open to conversion "from self-seeking egotism to self-giving love" (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 83), witnesses to God's reign in human history. This witness expresses itself through both the "mutual esteem, reverence and harmony" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 92) within the Christian community and the responsiveness of all the baptised to those on the margins of society, and of the Church. The willingness "to acknowledge all legitimate diversity" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 92) and an ever-deepening commitment to the discipleship that gives preference to "the least" (Matt 25:40) testify to the Church's source in Christ and the Spirit, and so to a community that the graced encounter with God in the Eucharist both inspires and constantly renews.

The vitality of the Christian community and the potential for the Church to be a creative and positive presence in society require the participation of all the faithful. The Second Vatican Council stressed that *all* the baptised, not just the hierarchy, share in the three offices of Christ as prophet, priest and shepherd (*Lumen Gentium*, 31; *Statutes and Regulatory Norms*, 1). These offices flow from the grace of the Spirit that Baptism confers. To realise the vision of the Council for a fully "charismatic" Church, one attentive to the guidance of the Spirit, dialogue must be a defining feature of the ecclesial community. Dialogue opens all members of the community to the voice of the Spirit who speaks through the variety of gifts, talents, roles and insights that are always present in the Church: "For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we though many are one body in Christ" (1 Cor 12:4–5).

The *Statutes and Regulatory Norms* for this Plenary Council weave together the variety and unity of the Church that St Paul describes and Pope Francis' "conception of 'a listening Church, a synodal Church'" (*Statutes and Regulatory Norms*, 1). The practice of synodality also showcases "the three conciliar emphases on the Holy Spirit, the participation of the faithful in the life and mission of the Church, and the need for dialogue between all the faithful" (*Statutes and Regulatory Norms*, 1). The

emphasis on a synodal Church similarly aligns well with the identification of the Church as sacrament: the formation of the ecclesial community as a truly synodal body flowers in a Church committed to service in and dialogue with the graced world.

The proposals that the following pages translate into concrete steps might aid the realisation of a Church that is authentically synodal. Such a Church is also one that can manifest the Church as sacrament, as “a sign and instrument” of “communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race” (*Lumen Gentium*, 1).

B1 Sacramentality and the Church’s Witness

The application of the term “sacrament” to the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 1) expresses the Church’s ongoing foundation in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The term connects the ecclesial community to God’s self-revelation in history, highlights its orientation towards the fullness of God’s trinitarian life and underscores that the mission of the Church is to witness to Christ in the world. “Sacrament,” then, is not a category that legitimates complacency or self-satisfaction in the Church, but a permanent stimulus to reform, renewal and the self-giving that reveal the Church as “the seed and the beginning” (*Lumen Gentium*, 5) of God’s reign. As sacrament, the Church is a project, a community that can be authentic only through constant conversion that seeks to heal and reconcile divisions within the body, while also opening members ever more deeply to their call to serve God’s kingdom. The sacraments that the ecclesial community celebrates, the sacraments that structure the community’s worship, likewise call people of faith to conversion, to an ever-deepening openness to grace, while also giving shape to the constancy of God’s presence among God’s people and sustaining the mission of discipleship that is integral to the Christian community.

1. Parishes, dioceses/eparchies, Church agencies and religious institutes, embracing the Church’s mission to be a sacrament of God’s reign in history, ensure that their programs and activities are attentive to the “signs of the times” in the wider society and seek to build positive connections to civil society.¹⁸
2. Preparation programs for the Church’s sacraments emphasise that sacramental grace works to build supportive and inclusive Christian communities while also nurturing a just, compassionate, and outward-looking Church, one marked by its commitment to discipleship in the world.¹⁹
3. Seek ways to increase access to the Eucharist and other sacraments for all members of the Church.²⁰
4. Develop online and other resources for the formation of seminarians, teachers and employees of ecclesial agencies to support the building of inclusive communities attentive to those on the margins of society and the Church.²¹

B2 The Practice of Synodality

In Baptism, the Holy Spirit gives to believers, and therefore to the whole Church, a special gift for faithfully interpreting and living the Christian Gospel in the diverse circumstances of history and

¹⁸ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 98.

¹⁹ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 93.

²⁰ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 36; *Evangelii Gaudium*, 47.

²¹ Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, 177–85.

culture (*Lumen Gentium*, 12). That is, the Spirit enables ongoing discernment of the signs of the times (*Gaudium et Spes*, 11). Pope Francis' call for the practice of synodality aims to embed more deeply in the life of the Church the key teachings of Vatican II, especially the Council's emphasis on the Holy Spirit's gift of the *sensus fidei* to all, the participation of all the faithful in the mission of the Church, and its call for dialogue within the Church and beyond. Synodality is a "constitutive element" of the life of the Church, Pope Francis says, quoting Saint John Chrysostom: "Church and Synod are synonymous."²²

The following proposals seek to continue the development of a "synodal Church" fostered through the Plenary Council's listening, dialogue and discernment processes. At every level of the Catholic Church in Australia (i.e., every parish, mission hub, diocese, agencies and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference), structures and processes for listening, dialogue and discernment between all the faithful are to be established as permanent ways of being Church.²³

1. All Australian dioceses and eparchies conduct a diocesan synod "within five years following the closing session of the Plenary Council ... and every ten years thereafter."²⁴
2. Each diocese and eparchy establish a Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) according to guidelines established by the ACBC. DPCs guide the listening, dialogue and discernment within each diocese and eparchy, leading to and engaging with diocesan synods. Local Mission Teams are encouraged to enable broad missionary discipleship amongst the local Church.²⁵
3. Every parish form a Parish Pastoral Council according to guidelines established by dioceses and eparchies, which honour the belief that all the baptised participate in the three offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King (*Lumen Gentium*, ch. 2).²⁶
4. Establish a National Catholic Synodal Leadership Council (NCSLC) to guide and monitor the reconfiguring and structuring of servant leadership across the Church in Australia. It will consist of representative members of the ACBC, a member elected from the DPC of each diocese and eparchy, and representatives of the key national bodies of the Church. The NCSLC will meet twice yearly prior to ACBC meetings, to which it reports. It is to be resourced by the re-directing of the priorities and resources currently available to ACBC servicing.²⁷
5. Establish an expert working party to take forward those recommendations of *Light from the Southern Cross* judged appropriate and practicable, in light of the ACBC and CRA responses to that report.²⁸

Further work to be explored after the Second Assembly of the Plenary Council

1. The development of statutes for diocesan synods, diocesan pastoral councils, parish pastoral councils and a National Catholic Synodal Leadership Council.

²² See Pope Francis, Address for the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015), quoting Saint John Chrysostom, *Explicatio in Ps. 149: Patrologia Graeca* 55, 493.

²³ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 97; *Light from the Southern Cross*, recommendation 3.

²⁴ *Light from the Southern Cross*, recommendation 56; cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 82.

²⁵ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 69, 73, 84, 97; *Instrumentum Laboris*, 130–131; *Light from the Southern Cross*, recommendations 50–55.

²⁶ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 84; *Light from the Southern Cross*, recommendations 74–77.

²⁷ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 78.

²⁸ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 76, 78, 82, 93.

2. Seminary formation programs regarding synodality and synodal conversion.

B3 Women and the Church

Ever since Vatican II, the Church has been seeking to establish the due place of women in the Church and society.²⁹ The Church in Australia received a blueprint for this sacred task in the 1999 report *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*. It is time for the Church in Australia to recognise “the changing role of women as one of the ‘signs of the times’ and [affirm] the equality of women.”³⁰

The Concluding Statement from the First General Assembly of this Plenary Council noted that many interventions called attention “to the importance of enhancing the role of women in the Church.” The Plenary Council Members “heard the call to conversion and fidelity, as well as to imagination and renewal.”³¹

This Plenary Council respects the teaching of the Church which precludes women from the papacy, the episcopacy and priesthood, but has been attentive to the voices of the participating women who have a consultative vote.

We are anxious to ensure that women in the life of the Church (as well as in the life of society) will enjoy “the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons,”³² insisting that women be treated “with openness, respect, acceptance and tenderness.”³³

1. Ensure women are appropriately represented in all structures of Church governance at the parish, diocese or eparchy, and national level, and in Church agencies.³⁴
2. Ensure that the perspectives of women are always considered, especially in relation to those matters which affect them distinctively.³⁵
3. Now that women are eligible for ministry as lector, acolyte and catechist, also consider them for ministry as deacon should Pope Francis authorise such ministry in light of the findings of the reconstituted Study Commission on the Female Diaconate.³⁶

Further work to be explored after the Second Assembly of the Plenary Council

1. Pope Francis has said that “it can prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general.”³⁷ It is a matter for further discernment for our bishops to ensure that those men with deliberative votes are duly attentive to the women with consultative votes when considering matters which impact especially on women. They who take decisions need to ensure that decision-making is not confined only to those who exercise sacramental power.

²⁹ See Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, #41; Vatican II, *Message to Women* (December 8, 1965) AAS 58 (1966), 13–14, repeated by Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, #1; Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, 29 June 1995, #3.

³⁰ *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*, 1999, Executive Summary #6.

³¹ Plenary Council, *First Assembly Proposals from Small Groups and Individual Members*, p. 4

³² Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, #41

³³ Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, 29 June 1995, #3

³⁴ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 76–77, 79, 83.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 62, 77, 83; *Institution of a New Study Commission on the Female Diaconate*, 8 April 2020, at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/04/08/200408b.html>

³⁷ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #104.

2. Anxious to enhance the participation of all the faithful, our bishops, together with women engaged in ministry, should share their experiences and reflections on women's ministry with Pope Francis's reconstituted Study Commission on the Female Diaconate.³⁸ Attentive to the abiding gift of God's Spirit which nurtures equality and mutuality, our bishops should continue to review the universal teaching of the Church which precludes women from the papacy, the episcopacy and priesthood.

B4 Formation for Leadership

Fruitful leadership in the ecclesial community flows from the grace of Christ and the Spirit that nurtures and sustains human wisdom, compassion, generosity and courage. Constructive leaders, attentive to the voice of the Spirit from within the Church and beyond it, cultivate mutuality and synodality with those they lead. Spirit-filled leaders symbolise the Church, embodying the faith, hope and love characteristic of a community of baptised believers. Such leaders, embracing their own need for a continual growth in closeness to Jesus Christ, encourage the ecclesial community's ongoing conversion, which supports and furthers the Church's missionary discipleship. Through their commitment to service of the Gospel and God's people, leaders foster the ecclesial community's reform and renewal, and so the Church's enduring discipleship as part of its pilgrimage to the fullness of life in Christ.

1. Make available a formation curriculum (adaptable to local circumstances), accessible across Australia and open to priests and lay leaders, to address the possibilities and challenges of synodal leadership in parishes and diocesan agencies. The curriculum, available for either online or in-person use, is to combine the theology of Church and mission with the skills conducive to synodal leadership; it will draw on insights into leadership from religious communities and PJs, as well from non-theological disciplines.³⁹
2. Commission a series of modules, available for either online or in-person use, to identify and promote skills conducive to effective engagement with government and civil society; the modules are to be accessible for all dioceses/eparchies and parishes, as well as being updated regularly.
3. Diocesan Pastoral Councils, drawing on the expertise and material of the National Centre for Pastoral Research, regularly review demographic data from the national Census and the National Church Life Survey, study social issues affecting the community of faith and explore and implement pastoral strategies that might respond to emergent trends.

³⁸ At the Amazon Synod, the bishops with a deliberative vote approved paragraph 103 by a vote of 137–30: "In the many consultations carried out in the Amazon, the fundamental role of religious and lay women in the Church of the Amazon and its communities was recognised and emphasised, given the wealth of services they provide. In a large number of these consultations, the permanent diaconate for women was requested. This made it an important theme during the Synod. The *Study Commission on the Diaconate of Women* which Pope Francis created in 2016 has already arrived as a Commission at partial findings regarding the reality of the diaconate of women in the early centuries of the Church and its implications for today. We would therefore like to share our experiences and reflections with the Commission and we await its results." See <http://secretariat.synod.va/content/sinodoamazonico/en/documents/final-document-of-the-amazon-synod.html>

³⁹ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 54, 82, 96–97.

Thematic Focus C To witness to Faith, Hope and Love as Missionary Disciples in the World

Context and Theological Background

Australian Catholics, as we experienced throughout the Plenary Council process, are very diverse. We are different Churches, cultures, ethnicities, languages and ages. We are women, men, married, partnered, single, lay, religious, ordained, in varied domestic relationships. We live in urban and rural settings that are distinctly Australian, shaped by the landscape and climes of this vast continent. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have ancient connection to the land; others of mostly European background have lived here for multiple generations; and migrants from nearly every country in the world have arrived here in recent decades. Whether by custom, lived experience, formal religious education or vocation, we have different spiritualities, theologies and views of mission, and different degrees of participation in Church life. We have different attitudes to the pressing social, moral and institutional challenges facing Church, society and the world.

As we listened deeply to each other in the Plenary Council processes, woven through all these differences, we discovered a common thread of Catholic “sensitivity”, including love of God, faith in Jesus, hope for the Church and a desire to do good under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

These proposals seek to give shape to the First Assembly’s deep desire for broad and deep formation for all members of the Church, for a more profound engagement in the call to be missionary disciples in contemporary Australia, for Catholic Social Teaching to be more effectively enacted and proclaimed and for Catholic education to flourish as an expression of mission.

The Church is not of the world, but it cannot be against a world which God so loved “that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). Rather the Church exists in and for the world and incarnates Christ’s love for the world, just as Christ incarnates God’s love for the world. To be missionary disciples requires loving attention to our world, which is marked by both sin and grace, seeking always to read the signs of the times and to discern God’s will under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Australia is a diverse, pluralist society with a secular form of government. It is made up of various religions and worldviews, including no religious affiliation. No religion is established or has privilege over others and all religions are free to flourish within the law. We can distinguish a positive “secularity”, which acknowledges the autonomy and relatedness of the secular and religious spheres and facilitates the flourishing of both, from a negative “secularism” which denies the transcendent and is toxic to human flourishing.

Christians have a responsibility to participate in all spheres of life, including political and social life. Yet we cannot impose our teaching or morality on others. Rather we must make our case, persuading others through our witness of life and use of reason. In his 2022 Message for World Mission Day, Pope Francis says that “the example of a Christian life and the proclamation of Christ are inseparable. One is at the service of the other. They are the two lungs with which any community must breathe, if it is to be missionary” (n. 1).

The Plenary Council has been an experience of encounter and deep listening to one another and our faith experiences. This dynamic of encounter and deep listening must extend beyond the Church itself because our personal encounter with Christ beckons us to move out from ourselves to love and serve all those whom we encounter and in whom we encounter Christ. Pope Francis encourages us to listen especially to people who are poor or on the peripheries, like the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

peoples, to listen to all of God's creatures, and to the earth itself (*Laudato si', Fratelli Tutti*). By drawing close to people through a culture of encounter, dialogue and accompaniment, like Jesus does in the Emmaus story (Lk 24:13ff), we can learn from others, and come to understand and respond to their deep needs – and to recognise our own.

Pope Francis says in his Apostolic Exhortation on *The Joy of the Gospel* that “to evangelise is to make the kingdom of God present in our world” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 176). As missionary disciples, we work to make God's reign of justice, love and peace visible in every dimension of our lives both personally and collectively. Right relationships with God, with each other and with all of God's creation call us to move beyond interpersonal dynamics and individual morality to take action in the economic, social, cultural and political spheres, engaging with social structures, processes and institutions too.

While we rejoice that our social service, health, aged care and education organisations do much to proclaim Christ through their service to the whole community, we acknowledge with sorrow that it is precisely in our witness that Australian society has found the Catholic Church wanting. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommended, among other things, regular evaluation and continual improvement to the “processes of ongoing formation, support and supervision of clergy and religious” (Recommendation 16.20), which the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference accepted, as well as the implementation of “mandatory national standards to ensure that all people in religious or pastoral ministry (bishops, provincials, clergy, religious, and lay personnel)” undertake “mandatory, regular professional development, compulsory components being professional responsibility and boundaries, ethics in ministry, and child safety” (Recommendation 16.25).

As Vatican II affirmed, all of the baptised, not just clergy and religious, are called to be missionary disciples. It follows that all should be equipped and supported in this calling through appropriate formation and that the vision for the future of Catholic education (early years, primary, secondary and tertiary) might be better seen through a missionary lens. To effectively give flesh and bones to God's love in contemporary Australia, all the faithful should receive formation in the teaching of the Church about life in society – Catholic Social Teaching – and in practices of interculturality and interfaith dialogue.

C1 Forming Leaders for Mission

This strengthening of the missionary vocation of all also requires a re-assessment of and commitment to the ongoing formation of ordained ministers. The *Ratio Fundamentalis* for seminary formation, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation* (Congregation for Clergy, 2016), acknowledges that this lifelong formation is not a mere “updating” of previous formation but describes a more fundamental and dynamic process which serves to enrich spirituality, deepen psychological maturity and enhance pastoral ministry (*Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, 56). Therefore, lifelong formation for clergy presumes a substantive transformation of ecclesial and priestly culture, consistent and accountable expectations and requirements across dioceses, and dedicated strategies and structures.

The Plenary Council acknowledges the call to develop missionary disciples and resource the lifelong formation of clergy and lay leaders for mission in the contemporary world.

1. Formation of laypeople and clergy⁴⁰

- (a) National guidelines and strategies for the formation of lay leaders be established through the engagement of local dioceses, various stakeholders currently providing formation programs and Catholic tertiary institutions. This will also require that each diocese identifies future leaders for mission, especially among culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women and young people, and supports their human, spiritual, academic and pastoral formation through a blended model of national, regional and local programs and strategies (noting in particular Recommendation 39 of the *Light from the Southern Cross* report);
 - (b) Formal principles, requirements and structures for the lifelong formation of clergy, including supervision, be developed and implemented in each local Church;⁴¹
 - (c) Each diocese explores, develops or re-institutes models of formation of the vocation of laity in the world based in an attentiveness to the “signs of the times”, communal discernment and a commitment to engagement with secular culture through listening and dialogue.
2. Young people, women and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are consulted and invited into leadership roles where the Church is interpreting and responding to its mission in the world (signs of the times), with strategic human, spiritual, academic and pastoral accompaniment prioritised to nurture these future leaders.

C2 Missionary Discipleship in Australian Culture

The path to a genuine mutual relationship between Church and society as envisioned by Vatican II (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 40), promoted by Pope Francis and affirmed by the members of the Plenary Council is encounter, accompaniment, listening and dialogue in service of the coming Reign of God.

1. Encounter⁴²

The heart of the Gospel is the love of God made known in Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 3:16). To foster a new missionary outreach to Australian society, we must recover this wellspring of the Church’s missionary life.

Prepare, publish and distribute a “primer” of guided reflections on selected kerygmatic texts, pared of all “secondary materials” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 34–36), tailored to the diversity of Australian Catholics, designed to facilitate “a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 3), a person-to-person encounter with divine love (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 3, 7–8). Made available in print and online, this primer is to be used to “re-kindle the gift of God that is within” us (2 Tim 1:6) in the variety of individual and especially communal settings where Catholics gather, e.g. personal prayer, family, parish, school, catechesis, youth, formation, chaplaincy, Bible services, Eucharistic adoration, retreats, meetings of diocesan and parish pastoral organisations.

⁴⁰ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 51–54.

⁴¹ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 65.

⁴² Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 35–37, 42.

2. Australian Culture⁴³

Ours is not just an era of change, but a change of era. Since both society and Church have changed dramatically, it cannot be “business as usual”. We must find *new* ways of being Church to respond to this *new* situation. But first, we must come to know this new society and culture.

We propose qualitative research into Australian culture, so that Catholics can better understand the society of which we are a part and to which we are called to witness. There are positive values such as equality, a fair go, transparency, accountability and openness, which the Church must learn in order to restore lost credibility, but society’s lack of transcendent horizons exposes people and creation to exploitation for short-term gains and creates division and ecological damage. Of particular concern is that the inviolable dignity of the human person, made in the image and likeness of God, is reduced to units of production or consumption or made expendable. The research outcomes will inform Catholics how better to engage critically with society in service of the coming Reign of God.

3. Listening⁴⁴

The Church’s missionary impulse is outward facing (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20; *Fratelli Tutti*, 88). Empowered by the love of God poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5), Christians reach out to others, especially the poor, the suffering, those marginalised and left at the side of the road (cf. Lk 10:35), showing them the same mercy, compassion and love they received from Christ (cf. 2 Cor 1:4, Jn 13:34). The first step is to go out and meet people where they are, to walk with them, to listen to their concerns, to allow them to express their joys, hopes, griefs and anxieties (cf. Lk 24:17ff; *Gaudium et Spes*, 1), and to listen for the voice of the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ in their stories.

Just as we were enlivened by “deep listening” during the Plenary Assembly, we propose formation for all Catholics in listening to the “other” so that we might discover in them “a brother or sister to be supported and loved” (*Document on Human Fraternity*, cf. also *Fratelli Tutti*, 8). The Gospel directs us to the peripheries of society, the poor, asylum-seekers, refugees and the exploited earth. Especially important are those who hold a grievance against us (cf. Mt 5:23), those who feel marginalised by the Church, those who are victims of abuse, women, those who are divorced and remarried and those who feel they are not accepted because of their sexuality or gender identity. Listening converts us and enables genuine encounter. After truly listening, not just to the words and the feelings but especially to the voice of the Spirit whispering in the conversation, what concrete missionary action we are called to do next will become clear.

C3 Proclaiming and Enacting Catholic Social Teaching

Through its social teaching the Church prayerfully reads the signs of the times, seeking to grasp the meaning of things, to discern God’s call and to generate guidance for Christian living today. The Australian Bishops teach on justice, ecology and peace issues at the local level in communion with the Pope. Hence our witness in the world is supported by both universal and local Catholic Social Teaching. The witness of the People of God in Australia to faith, hope and love in the world

⁴³ Cf. Bishop Mark Edwards OMI and James McEvoy, *Understanding Australian Culture*, Submission to First Assembly.

⁴⁴ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 3, 37 (point 12), p. 97 (point 10); *Preparatory Document for 2023 Synod of Bishops ‘For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission,’* nn. 9, 15.

contributes to the tradition of Catholic social thought and action, which in turn informs the ongoing development of the social teachings.

Ways to proclaim and enact Catholic Social Teaching more effectively:

1. The People of God in Australia joyfully receives the invitation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council to develop its capacity for genuine interculturality by including cultural competency in an ongoing manner in the orientation and/or continuing formation offerings of all Catholic entities.⁴⁵
2. A national framework for formation in Catholic Social Teaching be developed to encourage, support and expand the offering of programs in Catholic Social Teaching, including programs for leaders in Catholic social service, health and aged care organisations, Catholic education and dioceses.⁴⁶
3. A triennial national forum of Catholic social service, health, aged care, disability, prison ministry, refugee and asylum-seeker, and justice, ecology and peace organisations, be held to identify and explore gaps and priorities for outreach, service provision, advocacy and formation, and to inform the ongoing development of the local social teachings of the Australian Bishops.⁴⁷

C4 Catholic Education (early years, primary, secondary and tertiary)

Catholic Education at early years, primary and secondary levels in Australia:

- (a) receives significant funding from Federal, State, and Territory Governments;
 - (b) is bound by particular Federal, State, and Territory laws;
 - (c) operates under Provincial, Diocesan and Religious Institute frameworks;
 - (d) comprises an extraordinary diversity across a number of significant fields.
1. Develop a national vision for Catholic education at early years, primary and secondary levels.⁴⁸ This vision would:
 - (a) acknowledge the rich legacy of 200 years of broadly accessible Catholic education in Australia, contributing to the common good and re-commits to continuing this mission;
 - (b) articulate the continuing vision of Catholic education as a contemporary dimension of the mission of the Church: the experience of Catholic education becomes one in which Jesus Christ is encountered through proclamation, through the witness of the lives of the members of each school community and by engagement with the world and the wider Church through the lens of the Gospel;
 - (c) provide a framework within which catechists in public schools minister;

⁴⁵ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 23–24.

⁴⁶ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 94.

⁴⁷ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 93–94.

⁴⁸ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 85–86.

- (d) recognise the extraordinary diversity within Catholic school communities and allow for faithful and appropriate implementation in all Catholic school settings;
 - (e) provide a critical reflection tool with which all Catholic schools could engage in their pursuit of faith, excellence and access;
 - (f) further enhance work done to provide improved resource material through exploration of a national approach for religious education and faith formation.
2. Bring together all Catholic tertiary institutions, in a spirit of collaboration, to work together to provide a range of formation opportunities that will support schools in the goal of implementing at local level the national vision for Catholic education in Australia.⁴⁹

This collaborative approach would see:

- (a) A co-ordinated framework and shared understanding of faith formation as Christ-centred. It is an intentional, ongoing and reflective process that focuses on the growth of both the individual and community from lived experiences, in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation and capability for mission.⁵⁰
- (b) A growth in partnerships across the country – tertiary providers and Catholic education entities – for the provision of initial and ongoing formation, and development and accreditation of staff in Catholic schools.
- (c) The development of a richer variety of formation opportunities – increased availability of appropriate formal awards, of short courses, of experiences, a range of fees, a variety of demands, a greater range of delivery modes and a breadth of locations for participants.

Further work to be explored after the Second Assembly of the Plenary Council

1. Explore the feasibility of Recommendation 39 of the *Light from the Southern Cross* report:
 39. That a national centre for Catholic leadership and governance be established that will:
 - 39.1 identify the range of formation programs that have already been developed and are fit for purpose in relation to ecclesial leadership;
 - 39.2 identify particular needs that are not currently being serviced and investigate possibilities for coordination; and
 - 39.3 examine how best to establish and resource the research and professional development opportunities necessary to achieve optimal training, development and formation for leadership.
2. To support the human, spiritual, academic and pastoral accompaniment and formation of young people, women and leaders from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the Church gathers and carries out further research into theological understanding, pastoral

⁴⁹ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 54, 86–87; Australian Catholic University Submission to Plenary Council, *The Future of Leadership in Catholic Education*.

⁵⁰ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 89–90; *Instrumentum Laboris*, 146.

activities and social perspectives of youth, women and culturally and linguistically diverse communities to inform local and national mission initiatives and the evolution of these future Church leaders.

3. In seeking new opportunities and strategies for living out their missionary discipleship, Catholics will need formation in discernment. In the many peoples and situations that they encounter, they will need to recognise and welcome whatever is true, good and holy (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 16, 17; *Ad Gentes*, 9), to stand prophetically against what is false, evil and de-humanising, but above all, to discern what the Word and the Spirit are saying, how best to witness to the love of God made known in Christ.
4. In the Church's relations with others, we affirm "the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard" (*Document on Human Fraternity*). To realise this vision, Catholics will need formation in dialogue – ecumenical, interreligious, and religious-secular – so that they can enter into genuine relationships of equality, mutuality and respect with other Christians, with believers from other religions and with followers of other worldviews.
5. As new missionary endeavours for engaging Australian society gather momentum at local levels, there will be a need to develop a place and a process for sharing those missionary initiatives, strategies, best practices, resources and ongoing learning, and authorising a Church organisation to oversee the process.
6. A vast range of formation programs and opportunities are already available through a great variety of organisations. Mapping these existing initiatives would enable better access to them as well as the identification of gaps to be addressed.
7. To make better known existing opportunities for formation in Catholic Social Teaching, identify gaps and coordinate the development of further programs, a working group including theological education providers, adult faith education providers, people with subject area expertise and other relevant stakeholders could meet periodically to map existing offerings and gaps to the proposed national framework for formation in Catholic Social Teaching.
8. Processes for the identification and articulation of the implications of contemporary Christian anthropology and cosmology for formation and action should be explored.
9. Action for the transformation of the world is part of witnessing to faith, love and hope as missionary disciples. Where possible, this is best done in collaboration with believers from other Churches and religions; we are one human family, living together as sisters and brothers with shared responsibility to care for each other and our common home. The ecumenical and interfaith dimensions of mission in our multi-faith society require further attention.
10. The Church needs to proclaim and embody the Catholic Social Teaching tradition with greater public credibility and effectiveness. The role of women in the Church, mechanisms for participation in decision-making by those who are affected, transparency and accountability in decision-making, as well as teaching on and attitudes towards sexual diversity need to be considered.
11. The sustainability of state and national peak coordinating bodies of Catholic social services organisations is important for building long-term capability for independent public advocacy informed by service and research and grounded in Catholic Social Teaching. Ways of ensuring the sustainability of these bodies should be explored further.

12. Mechanisms for more frequent and effective communication and coordination between leaders in Church agencies and dioceses to promote and express more clearly a shared sense of mission in and for the world should be explored.
13. The model of parishes as centres of service warrants further exploration by Dioceses.
14. More effective ways of celebrating and communicating the work of Church agencies as part of the Church's witness in and to the world could be explored by Church communications personnel.

Thematic Focus D To proclaim God’s new creation as people of prayer, healing and hope (Reconciliation, compassion for the wounded, care for our common home)

D1 Liturgical Worship

Context and Theological Background

In the words of the Second Vatican Council, “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed and at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows.” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). While the liturgical reforms instituted by the Council have greatly enhanced the communal aspects of the Eucharistic celebration, the Council’s teaching that the Eucharist is “a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 8) still awaits realisation. Australian Catholics, especially youth, today learn their faith in a culture of indifference and even hostility to Christianity. There is consequently a great thirst for liturgy to be an encounter like that of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 135), in which Christ may be experienced as both fellow pilgrim and transcendent God.

The Plenary Council encourages all those involved in celebrations of the liturgy to foster a sense of the transcendence of God through the prayerfulness of each celebration, the beauty of music and art, and the care taken of church buildings and furnishings, so as to provide an inspiring setting suitable for the worship of the Triune God. At the same time, it is important that the liturgy be celebrated in a way that is welcoming to all and accessible. In the preparation of liturgical and Scriptural translations, and in the production of other resources for prayer and worship, a sensitive balance should be kept between the need for comprehensible and inclusive language, fidelity to the meaning of the original texts of Latin, Greek, Hebrew and other foundational languages, and the transcendent aspect of worship. Those responsible for translations must remember that “catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity” (St John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* 23) according to the ancient principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, and should maintain a close correspondence between Scriptural, liturgical and theological language.

Proposals

1. Acknowledge the pre-eminent role of liturgical worship in the formation of Christian faith and life, and the consequent need for a renewal of the means by which the faith is communicated, both in the celebration of the Eucharist and in other occasions of common prayer. In particular, commit to planning and promoting communal public events in service of forming Catholic belief, culture and identity, such as Feast Day celebrations, Eucharistic processions and adoration, and the development and performance of music for worship.⁵¹
2. Increase formation opportunities in dioceses and parishes to facilitate the preparation and celebration of the liturgical rites of the Church in keeping with the vision of the liturgical renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council.⁵² This will include encouraging fidelity to the Church’s norms in relation to liturgical ministries, the expression of texts (in vernacular

⁵¹ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 36, 44–45.

⁵² Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 36–37.

and Latin), appropriate and worthy liturgical music (chant and other styles), carefully prepared rituals and attention to the beauty of the setting in which people worship. The whole community should be enabled to participate fully, consciously and actively in the liturgy, the source and summit of the Christian life.

3. In approving the translations of prayers and Scripture passages for use in the liturgy, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference take care that translations sensitively balance the requirements of fidelity to the original text and the dignity of the liturgical services, with the needs of clear and inclusive language.⁵³
4. Endorse a program of Eucharistic renewal to strengthen the faith of Australian Catholics in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, including an Australian bid for the 2028 International Eucharistic Congress.⁵⁴

D2 Conversion

Context and Theological Background

Conversion/reconciliation lies at the heart of the Gospel. According to the proclamation of Jesus, “The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15), the “Kingdom” or “Reign” of God is a divine outreach of unconditional forgiveness, love and mercy to a sinful and wounded world to reclaim it for truly human living according to the original and still valid design of the Creator. The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) summarise the values by which disciples are to live in order to be “light” and “salt” to a world sorely in need of healing and inspiration. At Pentecost the Spirit of love that had rested upon Jesus was poured out upon the disciples, empowering them to take up the “good news” (Gospel) of divine forgiveness, love and mercy in his name (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 2:1-3).

St Paul, called by the risen Lord to take the message beyond Israel to the nations of the world (Galatians 1:16), expresses the summons to conversion as follows: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation ... We entreat you on behalf of Christ, ‘Be reconciled to God’.” (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). Paul spoke these words to the community at Corinth, who had already heard and responded to the Gospel. He placed the basic message before them again because reconciliation is not a once-off but an ongoing requirement for believers. As Jesus reminded Peter in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35), the reconciliation and forgiveness believers have received from God must continuously flow through them to their life in community, healing the hurts, wounds and divisions that are inevitably part of the life of a community still on the way to the full realisation of the kingdom.

Granted the centrality of conversion/reconciliation to our Christian life it is essential to recapture a practice of it that is meaningful for our time and situation. However, as widely acknowledged (see *Instrumentum Laboris*, 32, 47–48), its expression in the Sacrament of Penance, particularly in the traditional form (Rite 1), has largely fallen into disuse on the part of the broad mass of the faithful. There appears to be a shift in the *sensus fidelium* that the sacrament, as traditionally practised, does not now address.

⁵³ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 38.

⁵⁴ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 43–44.

The renewal associated with Vatican II, especially the wider familiarity with Scripture, has fostered an image of God as merciful and healing rather than punitive and threatening. This may have contributed to the decline in frequent confessions, particularly in the practice of confessing a list of misdemeanors that seemed to have little relation to the more serious evils and suffering in the world. However, while the practice of sacramental reconciliation may be less frequent, the sacrament can still foster a sense of profound conversion on both an individual and communal level, especially in seasons such as Lent and Advent.

The Sacrament of Penance needs to be aligned more realistically with social responsibility and the communal dimension of conversion needs to be recaptured. Reconciliation should address not only injury to fellow human beings but also, as Pope Francis has particularly emphasised, injury to the earth, the “common home” of all humanity.

With the decline of the practice of individual confession, the Eucharistic celebration has become the chief locus for the experience of conversion/reconciliation with God and the community of the faithful on a regular basis. While the experience of God’s mercy pervades the entire celebration, the focus on mercy is more explicit at some points, such as in the opening Penitential Act in the Roman Rite. Such moments need to be celebrated in a way that truly touches the heart and creates the disposition to hear the Word and participate in the Sacrament at transformative depth. The admonition of St Paul to the Christians of Corinth, “*Examine yourselves, and only then, eat of the bread and drink of the cup*” (1 Corinthians 11:28) remains valid for our time.⁵⁵

Proposals

1. Institute a sustained program of catechesis around the practice of the Sacrament of Penance to promote an understanding and appropriate practice of each of the three rites.⁵⁶
2. To recapture the communal dimension of the Sacrament of Penance, request the reinstatement of the Third Rite of Reconciliation for occasions when it is particularly appropriate, granted an understanding among the faithful of its distinctive nature and requirements.⁵⁷
3. Enhance the Penitential Act during the Eucharistic celebration to promote awareness of the communal dimension of conversion, as well as to foster an atmosphere of worship that is at once transcendent, welcoming and merciful. This would serve as preparation for hearing the Word and partaking of the Sacrament with heart and conscience properly disposed.⁵⁸
4. In line with the call of Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato si'*, give particular emphasis to the ecological dimension of conversion, making clear the sinful nature of damage to and exploitation of the environment, and calling for the preservation of the earth as a “common home” for all, including the generations to come.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, 93–94.

⁵⁶ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 45–46, proposal 31; p. 89, proposal 73.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, 47; *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 55, proposal 36

⁵⁸ Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris* 48, 72, 74, 75, 84, 103, 135–136.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris* 186–191; also 14, 64, 154, 155, 158; *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 32–34

Context and Theological Background

Preaching the Gospel lies at the heart of Christian witness. St Paul's question to the Church in Rome remains valid for the Church in Australia today. "How can they believe in him [Jesus Christ] if they have never heard of him? And how will they hear of him unless there is a preacher for them? And how will there be preachers if they are not sent?" (Romans 10:14-15).

Currently, in Eucharistic liturgies, this dimension of preaching is entrusted to the ordained ministry by sharing with presbyters and deacons the bishop's teaching and prophetic office. However, Vatican II affirms *all* the baptised participate in this prophetic office (the office of preaching and teaching): "Christ is the great prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of the Father both by the testimony of his life and the power of his word. Until the full manifestation of his glory, he fulfils this prophetic office, not only through the hierarchy who teach in his name and by his power, but also through the laity" (*Lumen Gentium*, 35).

It is clear that there is a diversity of ways in which the Word of Christ is proclaimed outside of the homily, which the proposal for an established ministry of preaching would also seek to support with the formation of adequately trained ministers of the Word. However, it is also the case that the primary locus in which the majority of the people of God hear the Word of God is the weekly Eucharistic Assembly. There are dioceses in which the declining number of priests has already led to lay leaders of weekly liturgies breaking open the Word and leading the community in various ways (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 124). Even where this is not the case, the listening and discernment process of the Plenary Council revealed a clear desire for an increased recognition of the role of lay women and men in leadership and ministry roles (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 44, 52, 54-55, 127) and corresponding opportunities for appropriate formation (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 52, 127). The signs of the times and the place of women and men in Australian society invite us to explore how the Word of God could be proclaimed by a variety of voices from different contexts.

This proposal stands in continuity with recent developments in relation to the ministries of lector, acolyte and catechist. In January 2021, Pope Francis issued the motu proprio *Spiritus Domini*, which allowed that the lay ministries of lector and acolyte "since they are based on the Sacrament of Baptism, may be entrusted to all suitable faithful, whether male or female"; and in May 2021 he issued another motu proprio, *Antiquum Ministerium*, to formally establish the ministry of catechist as an "expert in the pastoral service of transmitting the faith" (n. 6). The proposal does not seek to undermine the place of clergy, nor to reduce the need for ongoing formation of pastors in their preaching ministry: we remain grateful to the many priests from Australia and abroad who dedicate themselves to this task of feeding the People of God with the Word of Life. Neither need it undermine the specific ministry of the diaconate in the Church. In fact, a theology of a ministry of preaching might have similarities to the theology of diaconal preaching in which a deacon does not preside over the Eucharist but breaks open the Word liturgically while offering the "chalice of service" in the world through their daily vocation. Rather, the proposal seeks to form a broader group of ministers collaborating with their pastors and bringing their own unique gifts to the task of preaching, so the Word of God can be more broadly known, received and loved.

As with all instituted ministries, the discernment, oversight and regulation of the local ordinary is presumed. The need for adequate theological and rhetorical formation for the ministry of preaching

⁶⁰ Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 38–41.

also needs to be addressed, with opportunities for regional and national formation programs to be overseen at both a national and provincial level.

Proposals

1. The establishment and development of a Ministry of Preaching, “entrusted to all suitable and adequately formed faithful, whether male or female” (*Spiritus Domini*) with the appropriate formation and training, in order to encourage an accessible, vibrant, well-grounded and faithful proclamation of the Gospel within a variety of settings, such as parish communities, schools, retreats, youth gatherings, Catholic organisations and associations, under the discernment, oversight and regulation of the local Ordinary. This ministry could supplement that of the many priests and deacons who dedicate themselves to the task of feeding the People of God with the Word of Life. The proposed ministry would support and enrich this essential dimension of Church life, in respectful and collaborative communion.
2. Request an amendment to canon 767 of the *Code of Canon Law* to permit, where appropriate and under the oversight of the Local Ordinary, those entrusted with this Ministry of Preaching to preach the Word in the Eucharistic Assembly.

D4 Personal Prayer and Spirituality

Context and Theological Background

The Plenary Council journey has revealed a deep desire among Australian Catholics for an intimate, graced encounter with Jesus Christ in prayer. Customary and cultural attachments to the Catholic faith, while representing the spiritual vitality and dutifulness of communities, need to be supplemented by an intentionality on the part of the individual Christian in order to rise to true discipleship in the Lord (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 136). To progress in the spiritual life, people need good guides and the modelling of practices of prayer. A renewed and dedicated formation in the Church’s rich and varied traditions of prayer – East and West, ancient and contemporary, personal and communal – is necessary to meet the spiritual needs of Catholics today and to encourage the Church in its mission to others.

Proposals⁶¹

1. Give financial and institutional support to diocesan prayer and catechetical centres, and parish prayer centres, staffed by qualified clergy, religious and lay people. These centres would help to reinvigorate prayer in individual, parish and family life and would promote intentional and missionary discipleship. Where appropriately trained persons are available, these centres would offer spiritual direction and accompaniment to a wider range of people than is presently possible.
2. Promote a national network involving members of diverse communities and charisms, to provide opportunities for Catholics to be edified by the mystical and spiritual traditions that have enriched the Church over the centuries.

⁶¹ *Instrumentum Laboris*, 14 (forming prayerful and eucharistic communities); 23, iii; 48 (“many people desire more spiritual direction and formation in prayer”); 88 (the prayer of the heart); and especially 139–143. *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 36, par. 6; pp. 36–37, par. 9–12; p. 42, proposal 22; pp. 68–69, proposal 51 (parishes as centres for formation of missionary disciples); pp. 71–72, proposal 56

3. With the special assistance of the Eastern Churches, develop a pastoral document aimed at revitalising the practice and understanding of fasting among Catholics in Australia.

D5 Integral Ecology and Ecological Conversion⁶²

Context and Theological Background

The worthy worship of God includes care for our common home. All is sacred and interrelated – a communion of all beings: “Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships” (*Laudato si’*, 240).

To exist is to be held in the infinity of divine love – every person, every creature, every tree and rock – all are our brothers and sisters, beloved of God, to be revered, respected and cared for as an integral part of the “rule of God’s love.” “For you love all things that exist and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it” (Wisdom 11:24).

Conversion to the Lord opens the heart to perceive creation as an utterly beautiful gift. “The human person grows more, matures more, and is sanctified more, to the extent that he or she enters into a relationship, going out of themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures” (*Laudato si’*, 240).

Ecological conversion entails:

- A turning from human dominance to belonging to the community of life and to interdependence with all other creatures.
- Awe in the beauty of creation and being nourished by a sense of God’s presence: “The universe unfolds in God who fills it completely. Hence there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things” (*Laudato si’*, 223).

There is a universal solidarity flowing from the Trinity: “Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity” (*Laudato si’*, 240).

Ecological conversion offers common ground for ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, a pathway to engage the broader society, especially youth, and also informs outreach to the poor, since the cry of the earth is their cry too.

Proposals

1. Affirm the importance of ecological conversion – personal and communal – and encourage dioceses, parishes and other Catholic entities to respond to Pope Francis’ invitation to join the *Laudato Si’* Action Platform and develop *Laudato Si’* Action Plans as the vehicle for that conversion.⁶³

⁶² Cf. *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 32–34.

⁶³ Cf. ACBC, *Cry of the Earth: Cry of the Poor*, Social Justice Statement 2021–2022, p. 17.

2. In implementing this plan, include at least the following elements:
 - (a) a public commitment, with governance models, frameworks, processes and procedures that acknowledge and engage all levels of the Church;
 - (b) regular reporting on progress towards and accountability for defined goals and objectives;
 - (c) co-construction of those goals and objectives with the people they are meant to support and serve;
 - (d) an open embrace of the ancient and eternal wisdoms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
 - (e) commitment to initial and ongoing formation and interdisciplinary education: tools to identify and move away from postures, practices and preferences that should not be continued; and tools to learn new ways of being, and new ways of doing.
3. Affirm the missionary impulse that so colours the prayers of Pope Francis at the conclusion of *Laudato si'*, embracing and seeing the connection between all and looking to the future of our common home.

D6 Healing the Wounds of Abuse

Note: *The writing group recommends that feedback on these proposals be obtained from people who have suffered abuse.*

Context and Theological Background

In responding to the issue of child sexual abuse, we listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to us as we attend to the voices of those who have suffered abuse explaining the lifelong traumatic impact of that abuse on themselves, their families and friends. Their grief and anxieties can “raise an echo in our hearts,”⁶⁴ so that we come to appreciate both the systemic and the individual dimensions of child sexual abuse crimes, and the responsibility of the Church and of all followers of Christ to find ways to address the failures, as noted in the *Instrumentum Laboris* and the *First Assembly Proposals*.

Christ’s trials and victory over sin, death and the devil during his 40 days in the desert (Luke 4:1-13) provide a model of courage and commitment for us as we approach the challenges of: dealing with the reality of our failures to protect vulnerable children as a Church, as communities and as individuals; engaging in conversation with those who have suffered abuse; analysing the causes and reflecting on the wide-ranging effects of abuse;⁶⁵ repenting of our failures; and accompanying those affected on the complex journey of healing the wounds of abuse.⁶⁶

Repairing the damage that child sexual abuse has inflicted requires addressing questions about the use of power in the Church and the accountability of those who exercise power in the name of Christ. There is a need to prevent the misuse of institutional power. It is necessary to ensure procedural

⁶⁴ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (8 December 1965), n. 1; *First Assembly Proposals*, n. 11, p. 15

⁶⁵ *First Assembly Proposals*, n. 13, pp. 18–19.

⁶⁶ *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 9.

fairness and just outcomes in responding to complaints. It is also necessary to undertake research and analysis that would guide and support the leadership of the Church in responding to the range of issues raised by child sexual abuse.⁶⁷

Proposal

Take steps to develop a culture of listening, dialogue, accountability and research through which the Church can undertake processes of acknowledgement, repentance and commitment to healing:

1. Acknowledgement

- (a) Acknowledging the damage that the systemic misuse of institutional power has inflicted on those who have suffered abuse, their family and friends, the wider Church community and our society; and its continuing impact on the physical, emotional, social and spiritual well-being of those affected.
- (b) Acknowledging the damage to the moral authority and trustworthiness of the Church in dealing honestly and competently with allegations of abuse and the concomitant damage to the morale of clergy and religious unfairly tainted and anguished by the criminal behaviour of perpetrators.⁶⁸
- (c) Recognising the steps toward preventative action taken over recent decades at local and national levels to foster a culture of safety and best practice in care for children and others at risk, such as the formation of Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd; and continuing to build such a culture in our parishes, our schools, our health and social services, and in all our Church communities.⁶⁹

2. Repentance

- (a) Repenting for the harm criminally inflicted on those who have suffered abuse, the vulnerable and marginalised; for sins against God by the Church and society; for the failure of Church leaders to protect, believe, respect and respond justly to those who have suffered abuse; and for the consequent breaches of community trust.⁷⁰
- (b) Publicly recognising and articulating the shame, sorrow, disillusionment and anger of many members of the Church.⁷¹
- (c) Renewing our commitment to the Sacrament of Penance, which calls us to conversion, forgiveness and authentic reconciliation through mutual dialogue, discernment and negotiation informed by the desire for justice, “properly sought solely out of love of justice itself, out of respect for victims, as a means of preventing new crimes and protecting the common good”.⁷²

⁶⁷ *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 18–19, p. 51.

⁶⁸ *Instrumentum Laboris*, 122, p. 41.

⁶⁹ *First Assembly Proposals*, pp. 14–20, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 51, p. 19.

⁷⁰ *Instrumentum Laboris*, Acknowledgement page; *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 4.

⁷¹ *Instrumentum Laboris*, 106, p. 38, *First Assembly Proposals* nn. 9, 10, 13, pp. 14–16.

⁷² *Fratelli Tutti*, 252.

3. *Commitment to Healing*

- (a) Strenuously committing to a journey of healing, in its different dimensions (legal, psychological, spiritual, and moral) and within different milieus (in individuals, communities, schools, dioceses, the Church as a whole and other Churches); and staying close to the places of pain and trauma in Church and society, to work for a “revolution of tenderness” that moves beyond defensiveness and self-preservation to offer healing and new life.⁷³
- (b) Utilising the skills of experts to develop “a culture of listening and dialogue” within the Church to understand how abuse has impacted those who have suffered it and to discover who those people believe have the right to speak for them;⁷⁴ and recognising that creating pastoral encounters with people and accompanying them as they reflect on and respond to their experiences is the way to a deeper encounter with the Lord’s presence and with the power of the Gospel.⁷⁵
- (c) Acting to prevent the misuse of institutional power and ensuring procedural fairness and just outcomes by: instituting and encouraging a culture characterised by transparency, open communication, sensitivity, impartial assessment, consultation, integrity and accountability at all levels within the Church and other parts of society; responding to calls that lay men and women be co-responsible with clergy in the leadership of the Church and in oversight over ministries with children and other vulnerable people;⁷⁶ and providing formation and better support, including requiring participation in regular supervision and review, for deacons, priests and bishops in their ministries to improve effectiveness and competence, especially in dealing with the issue of abuse.⁷⁷
- (d) Creating a specific ministry to extend and facilitate the Church’s commitment to healing.⁷⁸

⁷³ *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 88; *Instrumentum Laboris*, p. 10; and 106, p. 38.

⁷⁴ *Instrumentum Laboris*, 133, p. 44; *First Assembly Proposals*, p. 9.

⁷⁵ *Instrumentum Laboris*, 65, p. 54; Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*, n. 136–140; 168–174.

⁷⁶ *Instrumentum Laboris*, 34, p. 14.

⁷⁷ *Instrumentum Laboris*, 122, p. 41 and 133, p. 44; *First Assembly Proposals*, n. 12, p. 16, and pp. 17–20.

⁷⁸ *First Assembly Proposals*, Concluding Statement, p. 4; Proposal 44, p. 58; Proposal 48 (Background), p. 62; p. 68; pp. 76–77; Proposal 63, p. 78; Proposals 64 and 65, p. 79; p. 83; Proposal 67 (Backgrounds), p. 80; p. 82; p. 97 (dot points 8 and 12); *Instrumentum Laboris*, p. 10 (point vi); 34 (p. 14); 42, p. 17; 53, p. 19–20; 55, p. 20; 116, p. 40; 126 and 127, p. 42.