

St Thomas the Apostle, Blackburn 3130

Plenary Council Submission

January 2019

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

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

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

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

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

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

People in this group:

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

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

Additional:

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

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