

HOW IS GOD CALLING US TO BE A CHRIST-CENTRED CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA THAT IS

Missionary & Evangelising?



*Continuing the journey of Discernment
toward the Plenary Council*

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of this great South land upon which we live, pray and work. We honour Elders past, present and future, and thank them for their sacrifice and stewardship.

We commit ourselves to the ongoing work of reconciliation and healing with all communities.

We acknowledge the lifelong trauma of abuse victims, survivors and their families, the failure of the Catholic Church to protect, believe and respond justly to children and vulnerable adults, and the consequent breaches of community trust.

We commit ourselves to fostering a culture of safety and care for children and vulnerable adults.



For more information on the Fifth Plenary Council in Australia please visit www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au

For more information on the Catholic Church in Australia please visit www.catholic.org.au

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Please note: The discernment papers are the fruits of communal discernment, which does not necessarily reflect the individual perspectives of each of the the group members. The Plenary Council team sincerely thanks all contributors.

Foreword

The commitment of time, faith and giftedness which has been so willingly given by the Chairs and Members of the Discernment and Writing groups over the past months is a witness to the work of the Spirit alive in our Church. As President of the Plenary Council, I wholeheartedly thank Sharon, Renee, Peter G, Peter H, Catherine and Selina for their leadership of the communal discernment process which has produced the fruits that can be found in these six thematic Discernment Papers. I also thank all the members, in particular the writers, of the Discernment and Writing groups, too many to name here individually. Thank you for responding to the call of the Spirit in this way. Your contribution has been a great blessing for the Church in Australia. Finally, thank you to the many individual people, families and groups who gave advice, shared wisdom and testimony, answered questions and provided support and guidance to the Discernment and Writing process.

The starting point for the Discernment and Writing groups was to reflect on our people's responses to the question: *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?* These responses were gathered during the first stage of discernment: Listening and Dialogue. The 17,500 written responses gave rise to six further questions for discernment, asking all of us to reflect upon how we are called by God to live and minister as the Catholic Church in Australia:

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is missionary and evangelising; humble, healing and merciful; prayerful and Eucharistic; inclusive, participatory and synodal; a joyful, hope-filled servant community; open to conversion, renewal and reform?

The six Discernment papers are an important contribution to the Church in Australia's ongoing discernment toward the Plenary Council. They are the fruits of discernment themselves, and help all the faithful as we work together to listen to God, praying, listening, talking and writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Each paper provides a reflection of some elements of the relevant pastoral reality, articulates a theological vision, outlines a number of challenges to be overcome, suggests prioritised questions to be answered and develops some proposals for change.

The papers themselves, of course, now become an important contribution to the challenge and privilege of discernment in which we are all engaged. While not in any sense the final word on the six thematic areas which emerged from the Listening and Dialogue process, I encourage you to receive them in the spirit of faith and discernment with which they have been written. They both invite and challenge us to continue to "listen to what the Spirit is saying".

Yours sincerely in the Lord,

Most Reverend Timothy Costelloe SDB

Archbishop of Perth,

President of the Fifth Plenary Council for the Church in Australia.

Introduction

'Mission' is God's initiative and proceeds from the Trinity, whose love overflows in creation and redemption. The Word and Spirit are present and active in the unfolding of the universe and in all human history, as evidenced in the goodness and truth found in all cultures and societies. The incarnate Son of God through his life, ministry, death and resurrection revealed God to us and redeemed us in a unique and unsurpassable way through his paschal sacrifice. His evangelising activity gave birth to the Church which is the visible manifestation of the Gospel command to "Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19).¹

The missionary mandate of Jesus to evangelise has various aspects, all of which, however, are closely connected with each other: "proclaim", (Mk 16:15) "make disciples and teach", "be my witnesses", "baptise", "do this in memory of me", (Lk 22:19) "love one another" (Jn 15:12). Proclamation, witness, teaching, sacraments, love of neighbour: all of these aspects are the means by which the one Gospel is transmitted, and they constitute the essential elements of evangelisation itself.²

'Evangelisation' means 'to bring the good news' and is at the heart of Christian identity. It is an invitation from Jesus who calls us to be his disciples, which means opening our hearts and minds to the One who began His public ministry by proclaiming "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news" (Mk 1:15).

The kingdom is the concern of everyone: individuals, society and the world. Working for the kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realisation of God's plan of salvation in all its fullness.³

"Fidelity both to a message whose servants we are and to the people to whom we must transmit it living and intact is the central axis of evangelisation."⁴ However, to be effective evangelisers we must recognise the signs of the times, repent of our failures, and under the influence of the Spirit transform our lives, our institutions and our world.

Despite the trend to greater secularisation in society,⁵ the Word and the Spirit are active in our world. The Church is the sacrament of salvation for our world, and:

her activity is not limited only to those who accept her message. She is a dynamic force in mankind's journey toward the eschatological kingdom and is the sign and promoter of gospel values. The Church contributes to mankind's pilgrimage of conversion to God's plan through her witness and through such activities as dialogue, human promotion,

commitment to justice and peace, education and the care of the sick, and aid to the poor and to children. In carrying on these activities, however, she never loses sight of the priority of the transcendent and spiritual realities which are premises of eschatological salvation.⁶

The sacraments of initiation into the Catholic Christian community welcome us into the community of the faithful and help us become faithful disciples of Jesus. This discipleship is sustained by prayer, enriched by worship, and empowers us to bear witness to the paschal mystery throughout our lives.

1 Vatican II, *Ad gentes*, n. 2, 3.

2 Congregation for the Clergy, General Directory on Catechesis, n. 46.

3 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, n. 19.

4 Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 4.

5 'Secularisation' refers to the processes by which there are an increasing number of those for whom God is not a significant consideration. In such a context, it is important to listen to those voices that challenge but also contribute to a deeper faith.

I. Listening and Dialogue

God's love endures, but the credibility of the Church has been harmed by revelations about the moral failures of some Church members. This knowledge has damaged the moral authority and trustworthiness of the Church, but it has called us to be holier and humbler in search of greater fidelity to a faithful and merciful God.

The renewal of our world begins with personal renewal of our lives lived according to the Gospel which invites us to a personal encounter with Jesus, who offers us the gift of God's love. "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 Jn 4:16).⁷

The rationale for the Plenary Council comes from an invitation to listen to the voice of God's Spirit in our Australian context and in listening to the many voices who have participated in this process we have heard a variety of hopes and concerns including:

- Women who bring their gifts to our communities but yearn for greater agency and leadership in the ecclesial community.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who hunger for a listening Church in which they have greater respect and participation at all levels.

- New migrants who may need assistance to participate more fully in governance and decision-making in the ecclesial community.
- Those who do not feel welcome at the table of the Lord because of personal choices, lifestyle, sexual orientation, remarriage outside the Church, patriarchy, clericalist attitudes and dissent from Church teaching.
- Those who attend Catholic schools who experience religious education but do not come to active engagement with an ecclesial community.
- Those who attend public schools who sometimes have access to special religious education, but many do not unless they attend a parish Sunday school.

As we listened to these voices,⁸ we heard sadness and struggle, but also hope and belief in new possibilities. The future will require ecclesial reform, but at the same time we are mindful that "missionary outreach is a clear sign of the maturity of an ecclesial community"⁹ and is also part of a process of reform and renewal.

II. Pastoral Reality

Australia is often described as a secular country, but we are a pluralist society composed of people who hold different religious beliefs, non-religious belief systems and worldviews. Our government does not privilege any religious tradition,¹⁰ but religion has a right to be present and engage in the public domain as can representatives of humanist, atheist and rationalist organisations.

Secular governments and their agencies have at times called religions to greater accountability, e.g., Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Churches, religious traditions and civic organisations must heed this challenge, repent over failures, and renew their commitment to live according to the high standards they proclaim.

In recent decades, life has changed for most people in Australia. Employment is no longer secure despite tertiary and trade education offering new employment opportunities, relationships are under pressure, young people are entering a world in which family patterns are changing, and life has become segmented and busy. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will exacerbate this situation.

The 2016 national Census revealed that Australia is a religiously diverse nation and our religious profile has changed over the last 50 years. In this time,

the percentage of those who identify as Christians has moved from 88% to 52%, with 30% of the population saying that they have no religion. The largest Christian group is Catholics at 22.6% of the population, but that percentage is also in decline despite recent migration. The trend is clearly decreasing religious affiliation especially among the younger members of our nation and baby boomers whose children have left home.¹¹

The diminishment of Christian influence has significance for our world where legislation, policy and practice are relatively independent of Christian values.¹² However, despite failures, the churches continue to be an important influence for good through ecclesial communities, healthcare, welfare and education where Christian faith and values inform policy and practice.

The Australian Catholic community has experienced a major decline in vocations to priesthood, religious life and the vocation of marriage. Parishes are led by a declining number of clergy and religious, although invigorated by ministerial collaboration with lay professional pastoral workers. Parishes are increasingly pastored by priests from other cultural contexts, and Catholic schools are almost totally staffed by lay teachers. The pastoral reality of Catholic communities is varied with some parishes

7 Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, chapter 5; Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, n. 25.

8 Among whom were a number who were not Catholic.

9 Benedict XVI, *Verbum domini*, n. 95.

10 See, Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, *The Australian Constitution*, https://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/senate/powers_practice_n_procedures/~link.aspx?id=6ED2CAE61E7742A1B2C42F95D4C05252&z=z#chapter-05_116

11 Australian Bureau of Statistics, "2016 Census data indicates "no religion" is rising fast," https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/7E65A144540551D7CA258148000E2B_85 (accessed 26 January 2020).

12 Cindy Wooden, 'Christendom no longer exists,' pope says, explaining need to revamp Curia' NCR (21 December 2019).

in numerical decline, while others grow and become increasingly multicultural. However, many in rural communities have limited access to Eucharist and to community meetings. The sacraments of the Church are occasions when we receive grace from God to live the Christian life. For some they are cultural and familial milestones rather than a faith journey leading to discipleship and active participation in the Catholic community.

Preaching is an area of explicit proclamation that many see as in need of renewal in ways that enhance openness to conversion, education about our beliefs and formation for Christian living.¹³

Education and financial pressures often lead to delays in relational commitment and many younger people seeing Church teaching on sexuality as no longer relevant.

However, there are also signs of hope in that members of the faithful persevere with the practice of the faith, COVID-19 notwithstanding, and are living their commitment to love of neighbour in myriad ways. There are new movements which evidence deep faith commitment, missionary outreach, and a desire for prayer and community which has the capacity to enliven the Church.

Catholic education offices have developed new curricula and pedagogies in religious education that relate to the contemporary student population of our schools.¹⁴

The emergence of lay ecclesial ministries in parishes, schools, hospitals and welfare organisations has given new vitality to evangelisation, pastoral care and outreach.¹⁵

Lay pastoral ministry has led to an increase in collaborative approaches to ministry in the parish context.

Catholic schools have leaders whose role is to support a Catholic vision and mission.

Catholic hospitals have pastoral care teams who minister to the spiritual needs of those who are hospitalised and their families. Catholic welfare has expanded beyond traditional agencies into the provision of support for people who encounter difficult moments in their journey through life. However, while there is evidence of this vitality, there are also signs that many people struggle to be missionary and evangelising due to inadequate formation.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse challenged the churches and our society to listen to the voices of those who have suffered sexual abuse. We are still learning but are developing standards and procedures to address this evil more adequately. Catholic Professional Standards Limited¹⁶ offers both scrutiny and support for dioceses and religious communities as they align their policies, procedures and practices with national standards.

Emerging initiatives in the Catholic community are exploring more missionary approaches focused on parishes, Catholic schools, religious life and practice, effective proclamation, digital mission and lived witness to the Gospel. These explorations will hopefully lead us to deeper personal conversion, renewal and reform of our institutions while stimulating missionary outreach. “The whole of the New Testament, and in a special way the Acts of the Apostles, bears witness to a privileged and in a sense exemplary moment of this missionary effort which will subsequently leave its mark on the whole history of the Church.”¹⁷



III. Theological Vision

Missio Dei (mission) comes from the nature of the Trinity as a community of persons — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — in a relationship of love and communion which overflows in creation and redemption. God is the creator and source of all life and our cosmos is an expression of God’s love for us. To participate in God’s mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love for people and for the planet, since God is the source of love.

The *missio Dei* is active in the evolution of the universe and in all history and cultures. God’s mission is, however, revealed in a particular way in the history and scriptures of God’s chosen people, Israel. This mission is fulfilled¹⁸ in a unique and unsurpassable way in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God’s mission continues in all peoples, cultures and in all of creation, groaning in giving birth, and striving for eschatological completion (Rom 8:22).

Jesus, the incarnate One of God, proclaims: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15). The news of the kingdom is manifest in the words and deeds of Jesus and his disciples bear witness to this reality (Acts 2:22- 24; 1 Cor 15:3-8).

The Church carries out its mission (Mt 28: 19-20) through its commitment to:

...presence and witness;
commitment to social development and human liberation; liturgical life, prayer and contemplation; interreligious dialogue; and finally, proclamation and catechesis.¹⁹

The call to conversion comes from God and is at the heart of the Gospel. Our response to this call is grounded in the discipleship of Jesus and nourished in community. Mission flows from the witness, life and worship of the Christian community and the ways in which community includes those most in need (Js 2:14-16). Pope Francis has provided insight into how a contemporary parish may respond to ensure that it is a community of accompaniment and encounter.²⁰

Called to communion and mission through the sacraments of initiation we are empowered to be “heralds of the Gospel”,²¹ a vocation sustained and nourished by a rich spiritual life for the missionary is foremost a “person of prayer”.²² Prayer sustained Jesus and we hear that he would often go off to “a lonely place and pray” (Mk 1:35).

¹³ Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 135-159.

¹⁴ Francis, “Launch of the Global compact on Education,” (12 September 2019). http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190912_messaggio-patto-educativo.html (accessed 27 February 2020).

¹⁵ Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *Faithful Stewards of God’s Grace: Lay Pastoral Ministers in the Church in Australia* (July 2018) <http://www.apmn.org.au/assets/lay-pastoral-ministry-2018-faithful-stewards-of-god-s-grace.pdf> (accessed, 27 February 2020).

¹⁶ The Royal Commission led to the many churches setting up more independent offices for Professional Standards for example: Catholic Professional Standards Limited, <https://www.cpsltd.org.au/>

¹⁷ Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 51.

¹⁸ The term ‘fulfilment’ does not suggest any negation of the Hebrew scriptures or supersessionism which is a denial of God’s enduring covenant.

¹⁹ Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and proclamation*, n. 2.

²⁰ Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 28.

²¹ *Ad gentes*, n. 24.

²² *Ibid.*, n. 25.

The “Church exists in order to evangelise”²³ and to live in communion with others and accompany others.²⁴ We are instruments of the *missio Dei*, and God’s Spirit touches all people in our world and calls them, whatever their religious tradition, to live life fully and faithfully.²⁵

The interplay of the Gospel and the human situation is central for evangelisation²⁶ so we must inculturate the Gospel while at the same time accepting that the Gospel proclaimed without an effort to transform society is foreign to the ‘Kingdom of God’ proclaimed by Jesus. This is a kingdom which is neither political nor spiritual, but the transformation of existing reality in the direction of the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus (Lk 4:18-21).

The Church is a sign and sacrament and is grateful for the Mystery revealed to her. However, God’s mission goes beyond the Church which is why we must be open, listening and learning, acknowledging that Kingdom work done by others.

“To participate in God’s mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love for people and for the planet, since God is the source of love.”

Participation in the *missio Dei* in a world where many follow different religious traditions is about relationship, dialogue and outreach for while all have “a right to receive the Gospel”,²⁷ it will not be heard unless we engage in respectful dialogue with one another mindful that the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills. “Dialogue leads to inner purification and conversion which, if pursued with docility to the Holy Spirit, will be spiritually fruitful.”²⁸

This openness to other traditions can only enrich our lives and strengthen our communities. In these endeavours we “should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytising that the Church grows, but ‘by attraction’.”²⁹

IV. Major Challenges

All Christians are called to be a “light to the nations” (Is 49:6; Mt 5:15; Jn 8:12). Accordingly, the Catholic Church in Australia is called to discover anew its mission to proclaim Christ in word and deed. In this endeavour, we are heartened by the words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii gaudium*:

I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.....
As John Paul II once said to the Bishops of Oceania: ‘All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion’.”³⁰

There are many challenges for the Catholic Church in Australia if its members are to fulfil this dream of becoming “missionary disciples” who share the good news with humility and respect. “Missionary disciples” are not simply religious professionals because all of us are called into this role by our Baptism which graces us with the life of Christ, initiates us into a life of communion, and calls us to share in mission, even though the Church’s mission

is a “single but complex reality”³¹ and different views of just what it means exist among members of the Church in Australia.

The context of the 21st century draws from our history, but the situation has changed so that we are no longer socialised into what some have termed ‘tribal’ or ‘cultural Catholicism’. Our relationship with the Church must be sustained by a deeper understanding of discipleship as relationship with Jesus in mission.

The damaged credibility of the Church in Australia presents a barrier to our being missionary and evangelising. For many Australians, the voice of the Church has no relevance. We face indifference and even hostility, which makes reaching out to others particularly challenging. Further compromising our credibility is the division that exists within the Church and the divergent views that exist among committed Catholics. Voices both within and beyond the Church are calling for greater levels of accountability and transparency. Forging a way ahead, which is a goal of this Plenary Council, requires carefully nuanced dialogue and an acknowledgement that there are no simple solutions.

23 Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 14.

24 Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 169-173.

25 Vatican II, *Nostra aetate*, n. 2.

26 Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 29; Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 177-184.

27 Ibid., n. 14.

28 John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, n. 56.

29 Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 14.

30 Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 27.

31 John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, n. 14; Secretariat for Non-Christians, *The Church and Other Religions: Dialogue and Mission*, n. 13.

For our sacramental initiation to bear fruit, our journey will be one of growing in our relationship with Jesus, the community of his followers and our wider society. This growth is facilitated through the family, the school and the parish community. These loci provide us with opportunities to grow in faith and develop our understanding through a systematic program of religious education, catechesis and engagement with the worship life of the parish community.

Numerous responders to the Listening and Dialogue phase spoke of the ways women have been the primary faith formators in families and do so best when this role is shared with their partner, but at the same time, they are yet to find places of greater participation and shared leadership in decision-making in the Catholic Church.

Nationally, we must forge deeper relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, oppose any prejudice, and actively work for reconciliation. As Pope St John Paul II stated in 1986:

Dreamtime legends speak powerfully of the great mysteries of human life, its frailty, its need for help, its closeness to spiritual powers and the value of the human person. They are not unlike some of the great inspired lessons from the people among whom Jesus himself was born. It is wonderful to see how people, as they accept the Gospel of Jesus, find points of agreement between their own traditions and those of Jesus and his people.³²

Since the end of the World Wars I and II, the Vietnam War and other international conflicts in which we have been engaged, we have welcomed migrants and refugees from Europe and more

recently from Asia, the Middle East and Africa, and they have both changed and enriched our society. We must resist anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and recent animosity toward Chinese people because of the coronavirus (COVID-19). We must also continue to examine our treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers who come to Australia by boat.

Catholic education has been a priority for our Catholic community, and generations of Catholic families made sacrifices to provide education for their children so that faith could be nurtured and developed through the culture and educational resources of our schools. We also remember the generous contribution of so many religious brothers and sisters who founded and staffed our schools without significant remuneration other than their commitment to be of service to God and the Catholic community. Today, Catholic schools educate 20% of all Australian children and we also engage in religious education for those who attend public schools. Schools are often the most regular places of encounter of the young with our faith, so we need to reflect not only on education but also on how evangelisation through our Catholic institutions can develop in this century.

Catholic schools have been successful in many ways, but we need to continue to review the effectiveness of the culture of our Catholic schools and the courses that they offer, especially in religious education, even as we seek to engage the parents of those who attend these schools.

In addition to the challenges, there are opportunities for the development of the faith of all Catholics. The number of active participants in Sunday eucharist has diminished but is still significant, so it is important to ensure that our liturgies, preaching and music are life-giving so

that people want to belong to these communities. This can be augmented by the renewal of parish life, parish-based programs such as the RCIA, but also programs of adult education that are open to those who seek to know more about our beliefs.

The Catholic community also needs to listen to the voices of those who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious, for desire for the spiritual is an indication of openness to the transcendent. Let us look anew at the rich

resources of our history to ensure that people have better access to the spiritual treasures of our Tradition.³³ Their statement is also a challenge to think about the place of the individual in our communities, to develop parish-based programs of outreach and to welcome people to life-giving groups where issues can be further explored.

“The Catholic community also needs to listen to the voices of those who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious, for desire for the spiritual is an indication of openness to the transcendent.”

³² John Paul II, Homily at Blatherskite Park, Alice Springs, 1986, n. 5. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/november/documents/hf_ip-ii_spe_19861129_aborigeni-alice-springs-australia.html (accessed 29 January 2020).

³³ Francis, “Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire,” quoted in Cindy Wooden, “Christendom no longer exists,’ pope says, explaining need to revamp Curia,” NCR (21 December 2019). The quotation is attributed to Gustave Mahler, but it appears he was paraphrasing a statement by Thomas More.

V. Prioritised Questions and Proposals for Change

A Christ-centered Church in Australia that is missionary and evangelising will engage the following questions and proposals:

1. How can the Church be missionary and evangelising by showing responsibility for the environment and our common home?

In these times of more frequent and intense climate-related events, the Church must listen to and learn from scientists, environmentalists, First Nations peoples and others who seek to live in sustainable harmony with our environment. Our particular evangelising contribution is upholding “life to the full” (Jn 10:10) for all peoples and creatures, by promoting biblical and theological teaching and action on responsible stewardship for creation and intergenerational justice.

Proposal

- That the Church in Australia draw on *Laudato si'*, *Querida Amazonia* and other relevant documents to provide inspiration and encouragement for developing sustainable ecological strategies adapted to our lands and climate conditions.

- That the Church increase funding to Catholic Earthcare Australia to realise and further develop its mandate through the activities of education, research and advocacy.
- That a representative of Australia’s First Nations peoples be appointed to Catholic Earthcare Australia.

2. How can the Church be missionary and evangelising through the service of all humankind?

“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”³⁴ In reading the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel, the Church in Australia must continue to engage the wider society on shared concerns that resonate with people’s lives such as peace, justice, non-violence, poverty, homelessness and solidarity with humankind.

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for

the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.³⁵

Proposal

- That the Catholic Church collaborate with other faith traditions and organisations on pressing social issues and learn from the Gospel stance of solidarity with the poor and the marginalised in our society.
- That the Church work with media professionals to more effectively promote and celebrate the service given to society through Catholic education, healthcare and welfare services, while strengthening them and challenging them to further develop their agency of mission and evangelisation.

3. How can the Catholic Church best educate and form Australian Catholics to grow in respect, understanding, and collaboration with other religions?

Interfaith dialogue is one of the essential elements of the evangelising mission of the Church.³⁶

“Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue...”³⁷

It is how we engage with believers from other religions in our multicultural, multi-religious Australian society.

Proposal

- That every diocese in Australia have an interfaith commission and that these

commissions exchange and promote interfaith programs and resources.

- That all students studying for ecclesial ministry undertake academic units on interreligious dialogue which include practical exposure to Jewish-Christian and Christian-Muslim relations and relations with other major traditions.³⁸
- That the Church in Australia celebrate the UN-established Interfaith Harmony Week in the first week of February, with an approved Mass for Interfaith Harmony Sunday on the first Sunday of February.

4. How can the Church work more closely with other Christian Churches in order to be more missionary and evangelising?

The Church in Australia needs to explore ways to enter into greater dialogue with other Christians in order to develop strategies and shared platforms for both proclaiming Jesus Christ as the saviour of humankind and jointly engaging in practical collaboration for the common good. “All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma ... Indeed, the kerygma and fraternal charity constitute the great synthesis of the whole content of the Gospel, to be proclaimed unceasingly...”³⁹

Proposal

- That Catholic dioceses establish covenants of faith and collaboration with other Christian communities.⁴⁰

34 Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 1.

35 Synod of Bishops, *Iusticia in mundo*, n. 6.

36 Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, n. 2, 77.

37 John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, n. 57.

38 Vatican II, *Nostra aetate*; Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to The Delegation of Rabbis for the Presentation of the Statement *Between Jerusalem and Rome* (31 August 2017); Francis and the Grand Imam of Al- Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, *Human Fraternity* (3-5 October 2019).

39 Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, n. 65.

40 Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, “Ecumenism.” <https://www.catholic.org.au/ecumenism-practical-resources/covenanting-local-ecumenical-partnerships> (accessed 27 February 2020).

5. Where does evangelisation sit as a focus for the Church in Australia?

The Church in Australia needs to adopt a more missionary stance with evangelisation at its heart⁴¹ to equip Catholics to become ‘missionary disciples’.

Proposal:

- That the Church in Australia prioritise formation for mission utilising the resources of existing institutes to advance the mission of evangelisation in our nation,⁴² with a particular focus on places where resources and expertise are scarce or where distance presents an obstacle to such activities taking place.
- That the Church establish short annual programs for priests and deacons to enhance preaching in an evangelical manner that relates the Gospel to people’s lives.⁴³
- That an annual conference⁴⁴ be held with parish representatives (either nationally or locally), to prompt each parish to ask itself the question of how it can transition itself to take on a more missionary and evangelising approach.⁴⁵
- That the Church in Australia further investigate and expand its use of digital media for mission.⁴⁶
- That dioceses and parishes develop vision and mission statements which are regularly reviewed, and which assist the development of mission strategies appropriate for each local context.

41 Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 24, 120-121.

42 Examples here include guest speakers, Lenten groups, theology conversations and so on.

43 Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 4, 11; Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 135-159.

44 The existing biennial Proclaim conference could be used as a model for something more expansive.

45 Examples here include street café, pub talks, mall Christmas crib, Cathedral Christmas lights.

46 For example, communications modelled on TED Talks and cut-through podcasts such as *Chat 10 Looks 3*, or the existing Catholic sites, *Word on Fire* and *Blessed is She*.

47 Examples here include Divine Renovation/Alpha, Building Stronger Parishes, the work of new ecclesial movements, Bruce Downes (The Catholic Guy), Bishop Robert Barron (Word on Fire), Sherry Weddell (Sienna Institute), Fr James Mallon (Divine Renovation), Jonathan Doyle (Passionate Catholic Teachers), and the entrepreneurial approach advocated by Chris Lowney, which draws on parishioners’ gift and talents.

48 For example, Teams, Marriage Encounter, Couples for Christ, and others.

49 Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, n. 204-216.

Accountability and transparency in regard to decision-making and finances will further enhance co-responsibility.

- That the Church conduct an audit of effective parish renewal activities and programs and promote them.⁴⁷

6. Given the importance of the family for the missionary and evangelising activity of the Church, how can we best promote a Catholic vision of marriage and family?

All families greatly enrich our communities and are called to witness to the gospel through both their joys and brokenness. Formation, discipleship and accompaniment must be pastoral priorities in supporting families in their evangelising mission.

Proposal

- That a culture of family be promoted which affirms its role in society and in the Church, honours parents in their role in the transmission of faith to their children, and provides formation and practical assistance to equip them.
- That married couple ministries⁴⁸ be activated as a key part of parish revitalisation and the strengthening of the couple’s relationship and vocational awareness.
- That a marriage catechumenate⁴⁹ be activated nationwide, led principally by married couple parishioners in

collaboration with parish clergy, that covers all stages of marriage formation throughout life.

- That peer support networks be established to learn from and accompany families in diverse situations. This would include single parent and blended families, mixed-faith and inter-ethnic families, families with disabilities, families impacted by addiction, domestic violence or sexual abuse.
- That the Church actively promote ministries⁵⁰ that encourage and form fathers to share with mothers responsibility for spiritual leadership in their families,⁵¹ parish communities and schools.
- That fertility services be expanded to train and accompany couples to live their marriage open to life, including those faced with infertility or complex health and social situations.

7. How can the Church actively promote the missionary and evangelising role of women in the Church, ensuring a better balance of men and women in leadership?

Female leadership is evident in numerous initiatives in dioceses and parishes where women exercise their gifts, abilities and talents. However, there are evident limitations in areas such as public liturgical leadership, diocesan and parish-based decision-making bodies, and in certain models of collaborative leadership.

50 For example, Men Alive, Young Men of God, Men of St Joseph, and others.

51 Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, n. 172-177, 287-290.

52 Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference, “Lay Preaching,” May 2003 Minute 86. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Canon 766: Lay Preaching,” 13 December 2001.

53 Joshua J. McElwee, “Francis: Women deacons commission gave split report on their role in early Church,” *NCR* (7 May 2019). A second Commission has just been formed by Pope Francis to further examine the issue (April 2020).⁵⁴ John Paul II, “Address of John Paul II to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders” Blatherskite Park, Alice Springs (29 November 1986).

Proposal

- That the formation of lay ecclesial leaders, both women and men, be prioritised.
- That gender balance in diocesan Synods and parish councils become normative.
- That dioceses, parishes and Church organisations promote qualified lay women and men to exercise their gifts and talents in various ecclesial community settings, including preaching in the liturgical context.⁵²
- That there be greater formal consultation with women about their engagement in Church leadership at all levels and that the Office for the Participation of Women be reinstated.
- That the Church continue to examine the possibility of a female diaconate as was indicated by Pope Francis after his reception of the report from the Commission he created in 2016.⁵³

8. How can the Catholic Church in Australia authentically embrace and nurture the culture and spirituality of First Nations peoples?

The Church in Australia must be shaped by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and spirituality for it to be authentically a Church of this land. When the Church sinks its roots deep into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, it will authentically be a Church in the land with a new vision and energy for mission.

As Pope St John Paul II said to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, "...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..."⁵⁴

Proposal

- a. That clergy, parish volunteers, staff and leaders across all Catholic institutions undergo cultural competency training.
- b. That the Church, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics, make a statement recognising the important place of First Nations peoples and commit to developing tangible mechanisms to further embed the rich culture and spirituality of Australia's first peoples in the life of the Church.
- c. That National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) Acknowledgement Plaques be installed in all churches and schools.
- d. That NATSICC, in partnership with the National Liturgical Commission, lead the incorporation of appropriate aspects of First Nations peoples' spirituality into liturgical celebrations, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday.

Pope Francis in *Christus vivit*, chapters four and seven. Formation for those working with young people should be a priority. "Young people need to be approached with the grammar of love, not by being preached at."⁵⁵ The focus should be on building up relationships of trust and consolidating them before "being too concerned with communicating a great deal of doctrine."⁵⁶

Proposal:

- a. That the Church conduct an audit of all initiatives in youth ministry and evangelisation to identify evidence-based outcome-effectiveness and support further the development of missionary teams of peers that can work across parishes and schools where members support each other and animate young people on a local level.⁵⁷
- b. That the Church continue to research the effect of strategies such as youth festivals and their potential to animate the missionary spirit of young people in order to continue to tailor these initiatives to the needs of our youth.
- c. That the Plenary Council 2020 delegates hear testimony from young people who have benefitted from some of the young people's movements that have gained traction in recent years.⁵⁸

9. How do we best support the growth in faith and in relationship with Jesus among our young people?

The Church, in recognising the importance of evangelising young people, must take as its key message to young people the recommendations of

54 John Paul II, Homily at Blatherskite Park, Alice Springs, 1986, n. 5. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861129_aborigeni-alice-springs-australia.html (accessed 29 January 2020).

55 Francis, *Christus vivit*, n. 211.

56 Francis, *Christus vivit*, n. 212.

57 Examples here include the National Evangelisation Team (NET) and Youth Mission Team (ymt).

58 Examples here include, but are not limited to, World Youth Day, Ignite, Australian Catholic Youth Festival, Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia.

10. How can our educational institutions best serve the missionary and evangelising activity of the Church?

It is crucial that our Catholic educational institutions have mission and evangelisation at the heart of all their activities.

Proposal:

- a. That at all levels of education, the Church and its educational organisations consider further opportunities for enhancing the preferential option for the poor.
- b. That the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC), while continuing to lobby for equitable funding for Catholic schools, facilitate and oversee greater collaboration between state and territory jurisdictions and dioceses to ensure mission and evangelisation remain a constant focus in Catholic schools.
- c. That the NCEC's Faith Formation and Religious Education Standing Committee be empowered to provide leadership formation for senior school and system leaders nationally and supported to develop strategies for the faith formation of students and families.
- d. That the Church acknowledge and respond to the needs of Catholic children in public schools (particularly secondary schools) and provide adequate specialist resources, such as paid personnel, to minister to these young people.
- e. That the Church encourage Catholic adults to undertake tertiary and other courses in theology and faith development, either face-to-face or online, to enhance their ability to serve the Church in a variety of roles.

- f. That seminarians be encouraged to spend concentrated time in schools as part of their formation and missionary outreach to school communities.

11. How can we as a Church most effectively reach out to people from all walks of life, particularly those who might feel distant from the life of the Church?

The desire to offer hospitality to people from all walks of life is a fundamental Christian aspiration founded in the compassionate ministry of Jesus. This aspiration translates into reality when our communities exercise outreach based on love for our neighbour. This is a mutually beneficial process, for the Church will learn from all people irrespective of race, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, age or disability, for we are all created in the image and likeness of God.

Proposal

- a. That all Church communications only use language that upholds and promotes people's inherent dignity as human persons.
- b. That dioceses and parishes establish appropriately resourced listening sessions to hear the needs of people who are: divorced and remarried, survivors of sexual abuse, LGBTI people,⁵⁹ and individuals or groups who feel disenfranchised. Also, that the Church accompany and provide ongoing support for all struggling with these issues while seeking to live faithfully in accord with Church teaching.

59 This includes other related self-descriptions, such as LGBTIQ+, which some respondents used in their Listening and Dialogue phase submissions. It is noted that such acronyms, while used respectfully in the compilation of the Listening and Dialogue Phase Final Report, do not sit comfortably with all persons whom they claim to represent.

Conclusion

The renewal of our world, our Church and our lives begins with a deep listening to the presence of God's spirit in our Australian context. It asks us to read the signs of the times and invites us to prayerful discernment. Mindful of these realities, we acknowledge our need to be ecclesial communities formed by Scripture, Tradition and human experience under the guidance of God's Spirit and under the influence of the magisterium and always open to renewal.

Empowered by the promise of God's enduring faithfulness (Dt 31:6, Jos 1:9, Mt 28:20) and the symbol of the 'Kingdom of God' proclaimed and inaugurated but awaiting eschatological fullness, we go forward as 'missionary disciples' of Jesus bearing witness in word and deed to all people in our world.