

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

# A Joyful, Hope-filled & Servant Community?



*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.



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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.

# Executive Summary

The Church in Australia is called to be a Christ-centred Church that is a joyful, hope-filled and servant community.

This paper responds to that call. It provides a summary of our group's reflection and discernment on data gathered throughout the Plenary Council process. Study of the pastoral reality identified challenges and opportunities; and a theological vision is articulated that explores what God is asking of us in Australia in 2020.

We ask that the Plenary Council:

- Strengthen parish communities so they become centres of joy, hope and service for their own members and the wider community.
- Engage positively and proactively with the broader Australian community, including those who no longer identify as Catholic, to extend the work of loving service for those on the margins.
- Strengthen connections between the specialised agencies and organisations of the Church with each other and with dioceses and local worshipping communities, to enable the Church as a whole to respond better to the call of Jesus to love of neighbour.
- Promote an integrated Christian mission by maintaining an emphasis on the various aspects of Christ's presence in the world, in the Word, the Sacraments and in our brothers and sisters.
- Provide formation to assist everyone to encounter God and respond to the call to bring God's love to others.
- Work to rebuild trust in our Church, within the Church and with society generally, so that the Church can be a joyful, hope-filled servant community for all.
- Adopt a mission-focused approach to financial accountability and transparency; and review financial allocations to renew the Church in Australia.



## 1. Pastoral Reality

Australia has been blessed with great natural beauty, an abundance of resources, democracy, peace and prosperity. It is a land that prizes freedom, equality and egalitarianism, a 'fair go' and mateship. However, mental illness, sickness, loneliness, family or financial pressures afflict many Australians. Many lack the hope and joy that are features of a good life. Fear of the future and a distrust of institutional authority are part of the social reality for significant numbers. Climate change is making extreme the Australian cycles of drought, fire and flood, threatening lives, homes and livelihoods.

In the midst of these challenges, the Australian Catholic community is, in many ways, a light in the darkness. With deep humility, the Church embraces love of neighbour. Catholic schools educate more than 750,000 students. Care and healing are offered to 1.5 million people visiting Catholic hospitals annually and 75,000 are served by Catholic aged care facilities. The St Vincent de Paul Society and other Catholic social services work with more than a million Australians each year. Catholic Mission and Caritas, among others, promote outreach to communities internationally. The bishops' annual social justice statements inspire work for justice at all levels of the Church. The many parts of the Church including dioceses and parishes, religious orders, Catholic organisations of many different types and individual Catholics significantly contribute to the Australian community. These activities emerge from a Church whose service helps us become humble and draws us into solidarity with people in need, sharing with them our hope and joy.

However, for many, the Church is not seen as a joyful, hope-filled and servant community that engages positively with the world. We do not always rejoice in the positive aspects of the broader Australian society and often our positive contributions are not well communicated.

Parishes exhibit great strengths, with — in normal times — more than 600,000 people gathering to worship each week, and finding there the solace of a deepening relationship with Christ and a base for service to others. A strength is the number of older parishioners who are able to contribute in so many ways to the building of the Church community. Other strengths include the schools, the St Vincent de Paul Conferences and other services that are an integral part of most parishes.

However, many parishes also need renewal. In many locations, fewer people are attending Mass, and the average age of those who attend is increasing. Some people do not experience parishes as welcoming communities. The decline in the number of young people who belong to a parish community is particularly concerning. Spirituality in our largely post-Christian culture may not include attendance at Mass. Many people today no longer simply accept what the priest tells them; they question and they challenge, and when their questions and challenges are not met with dialogue, they walk away. There is a deep sadness in many of the faithful at the low number of families and young people among their worshipping communities. For many school-aged Catholics and

their families, the school rather than the parish is their primary point of contact with the Catholic community, and the school and the rest of the parish sometimes seem to operate independently of each other.

Most of our clergy are dedicated and valued servants of the people of God. Their pastoral presence enriches the local community. However, there are fewer and ageing local clergy, and, generally, regard for the clergy is less positive than previously. Reasons for this include the revelations of child sexual abuse and the unacceptable response of many Church leaders to this scandal. More generally, in our materialistic, consumerist and secular age, there is a disinterest in organised religion and a distrust of institutional authority.

There is unease in many parts of the Church about relations between clergy and laity, leading to disconnection and disengagement. In too many cases, the people do not feel welcomed as partners in parish leadership, and clergy are seen to exercise power without accountability or transparency. On the other hand, some parishioners attend Mass and receive the Eucharist without seeing a need to participate in other dimensions of parish life, a reality exacerbated by the time pressure on families where both parents are working.

While women lead in many of the works of the Church, and in many areas of service, the under-representation of women in formal leadership roles in parishes, and their exclusion from ordained ministry, are challenging issues. Many feel that their presence is not valued in the day-to-day life of the parish, notwithstanding papal reiterations of the teaching on a male priesthood and that the introduction of women deacons remains under review in Rome.

From its originally predominantly Irish foundations, the Church in Australia has become an increasingly multicultural community. There is a great richness in

the gifts brought by people from different cultures and this is a hallmark of many parishes. The various Rites of the Church in Australia bring beauty and richness in diversity. Clergy from many cultures, too, can provide special blessings, and an opportunity for hospitality from the local community, but the pastoral reality in these cases can also be one of challenge rather than community enhancement. The effectiveness of the engagement of parishioners and priests can be hampered by language or cultural differences.

The Church has been working for some time to embrace Australia's First Nations peoples, to value and learn from their rich tradition, culture and experience, but there is much more to be done before their rightful place in the Church is established.

There can sometimes seem to be a disconnect between, on the one hand, a theology focusing on prayer and worship, and, on the other hand, one with a focus on loving service, ministering as Jesus did to those on the edge and through this process encountering Christ without necessarily naming him in this encounter.

Finances constrain many of our dioceses and parishes. Wealthier dioceses and parishes already provide some financial support to those that have fewer resources, but there remains a large disparity in the way the various parts of the Church in Australia are resourced to provide the services and outreach that is their calling. Furthermore, as Church attendance decreases, there are fewer donors to maintain the income that flows into the Church. This is putting financial pressure on the Church as a whole, and might raise further issues of equity.

Part of the pastoral reality, too, is that, as evidenced in the first discernment phase of the Plenary Council<sup>1</sup>, there is a great diversity of opinion on how to move forward to address the challenges facing our Church in Australia in 2020.



Through our Baptism, we all take on the mission of Jesus: to bring God's love to the world. This mission is at the heart of all we do; and this mission has a Church to sustain us and bring life to our world.

This Catholic Church is the Body of Christ, with many parts forming the one organic whole. The Church is the People of God made up of individuals and encompassing parishes, schools, hospitals, charitable ministries and other organisations. The Church in Australia is a community comprising people from all nations — blessed by a diversity of rites, and part of the universal Church, with Christ as its head, in communion with the Saints.

From the time of the early Christians, many have followed the example of Jesus and lived joyful, hope-filled lives of service. The servant nature of the Church is central to the Gospel message. It “is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel.”<sup>2</sup> The call to service is nourished by the deepening of our personal relationship with God through the Word and the Sacraments.

This servant nature was lived out by the early followers of Christ, where “the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). Their joy was evident, flowing from their love of God, and flowing into the workings of a servant community; and

so was their hope. They were the beginnings of the Church that unfolded under the guidance of the Spirit as a “community of faith, hope and charity.”<sup>3</sup>

Many in our Church today follow the example of Jesus and embrace a life of service: supporting fellow parishioners, caring for older Australians, responding to the needs of bushfire victims or visiting homes of people in need. Such service is an expression of the hope of those who serve, and it enhances the experience of belonging, of community and of joy. Joy comes much more from giving and serving than from receiving, from putting God and others first in our lives.

Joy is the fruit of Jesus' teaching: “I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete” (John 15:11). Joy is the zest for life, the sparkle in the eye, the fruit of our experience of being forgiven by others and, in particular, by God. Joy is a fundamental element of the servant community we strive to build, and flows from God's love for us.

Pope Francis further emphasises the centrality of joy for Christians:

The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who

<sup>1</sup> Trudy Dantis, Paul Howell, Stephen Reid, Leith Dudfield 2019 'Listen to what the Spirit is saying: Final Report for the Plenary Council Phase 1: Listening and Dialogue' National Centre for Pastoral Research - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Canberra, at [www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/reports](http://www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/reports)

<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict XVI 2005 *Encyclical Letter God is Love - Deus Caritas Est*, n 22  
<sup>3</sup> Vatican II 1964 *Lumen Gentium - Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, n 8

accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew.<sup>4</sup>

He reminds us that joy is restored when we come back to God whenever we are lost; that joy is what we experience in daily life when we respond to the unconditional love of our God<sup>5</sup>; and that God “makes us realise that his love is not cheerless, but pure joy, welling up whenever we allow ourselves to be loved by him”<sup>6</sup>. This joy spreads to the Church as a whole from its core: “the joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church.”<sup>7</sup> When he observes that “there are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter,”<sup>8</sup> it is to note that “we all have to let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress.”<sup>9</sup>

Hope is a fundamental Christian virtue and, for Christians, hope differs from the hope of a world that places its trust in scientific and political processes, even as we welcome the contribution of these to human wellbeing. Pope Benedict XVI presents Christian hope as arising from an encounter with God that assists us in the present:

We have been given hope, (so that) the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey.<sup>10</sup>

Christian hope enables us to look forward with desire and confidence, based on our personal faith, choosing to trust, as Corrie ten Boom put it, an unknown future

to a known God. Gratitude for God’s love for us is a cause for joy and underpins our decision to embrace this forward-looking hope.

Pope Francis continued to break open the message of hope through Jesus — with its intimate connection with service — in his response to the global pandemic of the coronavirus.

Embracing his cross means finding the courage to embrace all the hardships of the present time... finding the courage to create spaces where everyone can recognise that they are called, and to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity and solidarity. By his cross we have been saved in order to embrace hope and let it strengthen and sustain all measures and all possible avenues for helping us protect ourselves and others.<sup>11</sup>

In the Sacrament of Baptism, every Christian receives the life of Christ, and is charged with the threefold mission of Jesus, which Pope Benedict XVI has identified as ‘the Church’s deepest nature’:

The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the Word of God..., celebrating the sacraments..., and exercising the ministry of charity.... These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of

her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.<sup>12</sup>

Pope Benedict noted that justice and charity go hand in hand: “Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity...”<sup>13</sup>

Pope Benedict also links justice and charity with hope — they are “hope in action.”<sup>14</sup>

Listening to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor has also now been re-awakened as central to the tradition. Pope Francis describes how St Francis of Assisi lived a joyful, hope-filled life “in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God”, showing “the inseparable bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace.”<sup>15</sup>

The inseparability of these three dimensions of Christian mission — proclaiming the Word, celebrating the Sacraments, and loving service to others — is at the heart of the Church. This framework calls us to ensure that we do not lose sight of the various but related ways that our God is present in the world. It reminds us that our work of service needs nourishment from the

Scriptures and from the grace of the Sacraments, lest the Church can become, as Pope Francis put it: “a sort of NGO stripped of the luminous mysticism so evident in the lives of Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Teresa of Calcutta, and many others.”<sup>16</sup>

The Word of God and the Eucharistic life of the faith community underpin this work of service by the many parts of the Church, by deepening our awareness of the life of Christ within us, and of the presence of Christ in those whom we are called to serve.

Further, these multiple dimensions of the Christian mission remind us that “Love of neighbour, grounded in the love of God, is first and foremost a responsibility for each individual member of the faithful, but it is also a responsibility for the entire Church at every level.”<sup>17</sup> The servant nature of the Church cannot, therefore, be an ‘added extra’ or something that only some in the Church do. Those parts of the Church that are a Christ-inspired, humble, servant community are centres of joy and hope and bring joy and hope to those they serve.

**“The inseparability of these three dimensions of Christian mission — proclaiming the Word, celebrating the Sacraments, and loving service to others — is at the heart of the Church.”**

4 Pope Francis 2013 *Apostolic Exhortation The Joy of the Gospel – Evangelii Gaudium*, n 1

5 *Joy of the Gospel*, n 1

6 Pope Francis 2019 *Apostolic Exhortation Christ is Alive - Christus Vivit*, n 114.

7 Pope Francis 2013 *Apostolic Exhortation The Joy of Love – Amoris Laetitia*, n 1

8 *Joy of the Gospel*, n6

9 *ibid*

10 Pope Benedict XVI 2007 Encyclical Letter On Christian Hope - Spe Salvi, n 1

11 Pope Francis ‘Extraordinary Moment of Prayer’, 27 March 2020 at [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200327\\_omelia-epidemia.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200327_omelia-epidemia.html)

12 God is Love, n 25(a)

13 Pope Benedict XVI 2009 Encyclical Letter Charity in Truth – Caritas in Veritate n 6

14 On Christian Hope, n35

15 Pope Francis 2015 Encyclical Letter Care of our Common Home - Laudato Si’, n10

16 Pope Francis 2018 *Apostolic Exhortation On the call to Holiness in Today’s World - Gaudete et Exsultate* n 100

17 God is Love, n 20

### III. Major Challenges, questions and proposals for the Plenary Council

#### Challenge 1 - Parish Communities

For many Catholics, the parish remains the primary experience of Church, but many parishes need renewal.

Catholic schools are an integral part of their local parish, but for many students and their families the school is their main connection with the community of faith. The needs of these and others outside the parish structure also need to be met.

How do we strengthen parish communities so that they become centres of joy, hope and service to their own members and the wider community? How do we respond to the role of schools as primary points of contact with faith communities?

#### Proposals

##### That the Plenary Council

- Initiate consultation on national guidelines in relation to the laity taking up co-responsibility with the parish priest for leadership in the parish and for building up the life of the community.
- Require each diocese in Australia to take action on the *Building Stronger Parishes Project*<sup>18</sup>, undertaken in response to a mandate from the bishops. This project

- sets out a process for building vibrant communities of faith, joy, hope and service. In particular:
  - ◊ Identify opportunities for lay ministry within the parish, perhaps resulting in a variety of parish teams serving fellow parishioners and the wider community, especially those in need. These parish teams would utilise, where possible, the variety of gifts brought by people of different cultures, as well as our First Nations peoples, to enrich the life of the parish.
  - ◊ Develop structures and processes to fully embrace the broad demographic of the parish and engage all parishioners in witnessing to God through parish life. Activities might include hospitality, bereavement, preparation for Baptism, Marriage and other Sacraments, social events, outreach in charity and work for justice or youth ministry.
  - ◊ Promote strategies within each diocese and parish to share information about what is being done, to contribute to the building of a shared community, and to inspire others by examples of what is possible.

- Initiate and resource a robust dialogue about the role of women in the Church, to consider the role of women in formal leadership within the parish and the broader Church, and to explore their exclusion from ordained ministry and many liturgical roles. Within this dialogue, and in parish leadership arrangements, the deep contribution of women religious, extensive female leaders in many parts of the Church, many pastoral associates etc, should be recognised and supported, new ecclesial ministries for women explored, and the dialogue in Rome on women deacons be engaged with. A revisiting by the Church in Australia of the 1999 report *Women and Man: One in Christ Jesus: Report on the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia*<sup>19</sup> would be a helpful complement to this work.
- Ensure that seminary formation and ongoing formation of clergy include a focus on building a culture of co-responsibility, on the just and consultative use of authority, and on processes grounded in transparency and accountability. Formation for clergy who were trained abroad must be provided, especially in the light of pastoral ministry in an Australian context.
- Adopt open and respectful dialogue as the mode of engagement between clergy and laity, to build a culture of trust. Develop opportunities at all levels to deepen such dialogue, including diocesan forums exploring the meaning of a 'servant Church' or parish focus groups aimed at a shared vision for the local servant community.
- Promote and develop the ministry of permanent deacons, as servants to those on the peripheries and as enablers and leaders of others engaged in these ministries.

- Review, from an Australian perspective, the ordination to the priesthood of married men.
- Initiate a robust discussion across school systems and all other parts of the Church about how we can strengthen and enhance the intimate bond between schools and their parish communities, to best serve the spiritual needs of students and their families. Particular attention should be given to the reasons why so many young people and their families are absent from our parishes, and how schools and parishes might address this concern.
- Require that each bishop demonstrate their commitment to shared leadership by modelling the process of Pastoral Councils within his diocese. From this, suitable guidelines for establishing Parish Pastoral Councils could be refined and promulgated.
  - ◊ The guidelines would include the fact that the laity are elected and are called to share leadership of the parish with the priest. The guidelines would suggest that membership includes representatives of parish teams so that the parish is transparently a community of communities.
  - ◊ This co-responsibility will require ongoing training and formation for all parties, priests as well as laity, in building trust and the appreciation of ministry as a gift of service to the community.

## Challenge 2 – Engagement with the Broader Australian Community

The Church engages actively with society, particularly in service to those on the margins, but it often focuses on the negatives prevalent in society, rather than truly embracing “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people.”<sup>20</sup> The challenge for the Church in Australia today is to engage positively with society in dialogue and service. In addition, local faith communities are challenged to play their part in building a more just society.

How can we extend the work of loving service for those on the margins? How can we invite all Australian Catholics to see service as fundamental to their baptismal calling? How can the Church in Australia engage more positively with society as a whole?

### Proposals

#### That the Plenary Council

- Promote diocesan-sponsored parish support programs to encourage and assist members of all Catholic communities to truly welcome those on the margins, and to reach out to those in need.
  - ◊ This could include cooperation, especially across parishes and through networks of parishes, to work out how we can encounter and serve those needing our loving care, including those who are marginalised through mental and physical health, economic position, sexuality or exclusion.
- Dioceses lead efforts to engage in respectful dialogue with the Catholics who identify as being part of the LGBTI community, work to include them in the ministries of the Church and provide opportunities for parishes to ensure that all are welcomed as children of God.

- Formation programs for all members of the Church, in parishes, schools and pastoral ministries, should include a focus on Catholic Social Teaching and work for justice. The action points in the annual bishops’ social justice statements are an excellent basis for this work.
- Promote, at national and diocesan levels, a conscious attitude of engaging positively with society, truly making our own the joys and the hopes of the people, and that this be reflected in public statements and public engagement, and communicated effectively for the awareness of Church members as well as more broadly.
- Develop a cooperative structure and strategy across the whole Church around communication with the general community, and establish a process for maintaining an overview of the work of all parts of the Church for the community so that, with all due humility, this can become widely known, as part of our dialogue with society as a whole.
- Ensure that national and diocesan structures that research and support advocacy on matters of social justice be maintained and strengthened, working in dialogue with others across society as well as with all parts of the Church. This is an opportunity for ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and collaboration.

## Challenge 3 – Celebrating and supporting the service organisations of the Church

The education, health, aged care, community support and other services of the Church are largely provided by professional organisations. These usually report to

dioceses, religious congregations or Ministerial Public Juridic Persons<sup>21</sup>, and many rely to a significant extent on government funding. They are generally viewed with respect in the wider society and they provide the main points of encounter with the Church for many people. A challenge facing the Church as a whole is to strengthen the connection between these bodies and parishes, dioceses and all parts of the Church, so that by shared endeavour we can maximise the contribution of the Church to the wellbeing of society. We have a joint responsibility to bring God’s love to all.

How can the Church in Australia work with its specialised agencies and organisations to ensure that the Church as a whole is doing all that it can to respond to the call of Jesus to love of neighbour?

### Proposals

#### That the Plenary Council

- Task peak bodies for Catholic health, education and social services to work with all parts of the Church in Australia to build a community of shared endeavour and a sense of shared service.
  - ◊ The personnel of these ministries should be recognised as co-workers in the service of the Gospel, and cooperation between agencies, parishes and other centres of service needs to be developed and implemented.
- Ensure that all parts of the Church, including service organisations and agencies, deepen their dialogue with each other to ensure that we are all working together and that we celebrate our service to the community as always rooted in the love of God, love of neighbour, generosity of spirit and striving for justice.
  - ◊ Shared reflection across these ministries and with other parts of the Church can

help ensure that the services remain linked in work and in spirit with the rest of the Church, and that government funding is accepted and utilised for the good of the people and does not undermine the Catholic identity of services.

## Challenge 4 - Promoting an integrated Christian mission

A key challenge for the Church in Australia today is to deepen our shared understanding of how the Church’s three-fold responsibility of proclaiming the Word of God, celebrating the Sacraments and exercising the ministry of charity are inter-related, lest we become a Church where various groups emphasise one aspect of the mission to the exclusion of others.

How can parishes, schools, and all parts of the Church maintain an emphasis on the various aspects of Christ’s presence in the world, in the Word, the Sacraments and in our brothers and sisters?

### Proposals

#### That the Plenary Council

- Initiate a national forum for all sections of the Church:
  - ◊ To deepen our shared understanding of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, in ourselves and in others; of how this presence connects all elements of our Christian calling, worship and service; and of how the Mass and Eucharist nourish the hope and joy that is a foundation for our service to the world.
  - ◊ To develop formation programs around these matters for all parts of the Church.

<sup>20</sup> Vatican II 1965 Gaudium et Spes - Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World, n1

<sup>21</sup> A Public Juridic Person (PJP) is a legal entity under Canon Law that allows various Church ministries to function in the name of the Catholic Church. Ministerial PJPs have been established in recent years as custodians of various ministries that had been provided by religious congregations.

- Provide opportunities for parishes and communities to reflect on the intimate unity of Sacraments, prayer, ritual and service offered to those in need.

## Challenge 5 - Formation

Most adult members of our Church are on a faith journey that continually requires nourishment to develop deeper understanding of personal vocation and to enable people to respond more fully to God's call to personal conversion. Formation that is more specific is also required to enable people to use their God-given gifts in ministry and outreach.

How can our Church provide formation for members to enable all to encounter God and respond to the call to play their part in bringing God's love to all people?

### Proposals

#### That the Plenary Council

- Develop a national faith formation hub to enable the collection and distribution of quality and affordable resources for Catholics across the country and address the delivery of this formation.
- Task this hub, or other appropriate bodies, to
  - ◊ Identify the requirements for formation at the local, diocesan and national level, including the health, aged care, social service, education and other ministries within the Church. What is needed, by whom and why is it needed?
  - ◊ Provide professional development for the people who will deliver these formation programs, so the hub becomes a personal experience of formation.
  - ◊ Conduct a national survey of formation programs already in place across the

Church in Australia. These data will be used to enable sharing and networking with regard to formation opportunities.

- ◊ Develop a strategic plan to address the delivery and resourcing of quality formation to enable all of God's people to understand better and respond to God's call to be joyful, hope-filled members of the servant community of our Christ-centred Church.
- ◊ Address the willingness and the capacity of people to participate in formation programs. For example, young parents may be unable to commit to external formation but could engage with online modules or Zoom technology. Research and develop formation opportunities to enable accessibility as required.
- ◊ Instigate the development of formation programs and adult education sessions at the diocesan and local level which explore core issues such as 'servant leadership', as well as specific formation aligned to particular parish ministries. Draw on existing organisations and resources to ensure the provision of formation programs for couples at all stages of their relationship journey.

## Challenge 6 – Re-building Trust within the Church

A significant challenge facing our Church in Australia in 2020 is the breakdown of trust between the clergy and the laity.

Could this time be a "watershed and privileged moment in the history of the Church?"<sup>22</sup> Perhaps from this humbling experience we can rise up and assume the role of a servant community, aware of our brokenness and work to rebuild trust.

How can Church leaders and laity rebuild the trust in our Church so that it can be a joyful, hope-filled servant community for all?

### Proposals

#### That the Plenary Council

- Ensure that the Church continues to learn and respond to the sexual abuse crisis as it humbly repents for the harm done to many through abuse and the failure of the institutional Church to deal with this appropriately; and responds in prayer and in practical ways for the benefit of victims and the safety of everyone who is vulnerable.

## Challenge 7 - Finance

Wealth and income are unevenly spread across the Church in Australia and there is often little transparency or accountability about decision-making in the allocation of funds for the various ministries.

How can the Church in Australia adopt a mission-focused approach to using material goods that directs resources to the most appropriate area, and is accountable and transparent?

How can we respond to financial limitations on the Church as a whole, and the realization that mission must proceed even if resources were very limited, while recognising that many of the recommendations of the Plenary Council will require funding to renew the Church in Australia?

### Proposals

#### That the Plenary Council

- Initiate a review of financial cooperation and re-distribution between dioceses so that all are appropriately resourced to undertake their shared missionary endeavour. This is particularly important in relation to the implementation of many recommendations likely to emerge from the Plenary Council,

some of which will require more resources to be available centrally, and some of which will require that dioceses be adequately resourced.

- Require that each diocese make public its annual financial statements, including details of how funds are used.
- Commit to ensuring that diocesan and parish finance councils, which are required by Church law, fulfil their responsibilities and are transparent in their decision-making, record-keeping and reporting.
- Adopt a spirit of financial cooperation, so that fair and just reviews can be undertaken to identify efficiencies in the diocesan structure of the Church and in the administration of education, safeguarding and other functions where there is currently much duplication of effort.

Initiate a national focus on the use of wealth in the Church, and its relationship to the Gospel call to service of those most in need, lest the mission of the Church be seen as a servant to its wealth.

## Conclusion

We are called in Australia to be a Christ-centred Church that is a joyful, hope-filled and servant community. This paper responds to that call. It builds on the material that has emerged from dialogue and discernment across the Church, to present proposals that will assist the Plenary Council to lead the Church towards this goal.