

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

Open to Conversion, Renewal & Reform?



*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

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Published by Plenary Council 2020
PO Box 747, North Sydney NSW 2059

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See more information online at: <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/renewal/>

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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

Christ, who makes “all things new” (Rev. 21:5) invites the baptised to continual conversion, renewal, and reform.

This Report by the Discernment and Writing Group addresses the Plenary Council question, “How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church in Australia that is open to conversion, renewal and reform?” Responding to the results of the national consultation conducted during 2018-2019, the Group accepted its commission to “reflect on Scripture, Church teaching and our contemporary situation, in order to discern the answer to this question.” (See <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/renewal/>)

The Group members, individually and communally, undertook study and reflection on the submissions and interim reports generated by the national consultation. Members also engaged in a routine of prayer, Gospel reflection, fasting and spiritual conversation in order to enrich communal discernment, asking “that the Holy Spirit grant us this gift, and then seek to develop it through prayer, reflection, reading and good counsel” (GE 166). The Group met in person twice (Melbourne 29-30 Nov 2019; Sydney 12-13 Jan 2020), supplementing these meetings with video conferences. The three-person drafting team collaborated regularly by email, shared documents and video conferencing.

- In the Report that follows, a number of key issues for consideration by the Plenary Council fall under three headings:
- Governance and Leadership: how to promote a culture of ongoing conversion and reform through renewed governance structures and procedures
- Ministry for Mission: how to strengthen faith communities for the mission of the Gospel through a wider range of vocations for ministry
- Becoming the Catholic Church with an Australian Face: how to embed the Gospel mission in the ‘soil’ of the people and conditions of Australia today



1. The Group's Reflection on the Listening/Dialogue Phase

To convert is to turn away from personal sin and toward Christ, the true source of renewal and way to reform. Voices in the Report cry out for Christ. Hearing this, the Group reflected on Mark's Gospel, and responded to the discipleship of Mary, John the Baptist, Peter, James, John and the women at the tomb. Joel 2 reminded that disciples are to rend their hearts, not their garments. In a time of social upheaval, Pope Francis quotes the same Scripture: God wants us to convert, to “return... with all our hearts.”¹ All the baptised are called to this conversion, by imitating and uniting with Christ as priest, prophet and king (LG 31).

Within the Church in Australia, renewal demands a cultural change: from power to service, from dominion to communion; from a triumphalist Church to a “Church which is poor and for the poor.”² The Report consistently names clericalism as a major obstacle to renewed Christian culture. Priests are unique witnesses to Christ, and Australian Catholics share a great love of priestly ministry. However, as Pope Francis warns, clericalism can destroy that love, by being “an elitist and exclusivist vision of vocation, that interprets the ministry received as a power to be exercised rather than as a free and generous service to be given.” All the baptised need to be aware of this danger. The Church in Australia as elsewhere “must humbly ask forgiveness

for [clericalism] and above all create the conditions so that it is not repeated.”³ Renewed conditions would turn away from the bureaucratic mechanisms and power structures that have facilitated abuse, toward a spirit of service where institutional structures and actions are transparent and accountable. Overcoming clericalism relies on all members of the Church community working together, with openness to ongoing conversion to Christ.

Voices in the Report are both joyful and anguished. The People of God want to live the Gospel, but identify contemporary challenges to finding and sharing the Gospel news. Parishes emerge as important centres for communion and renewal. At the same time, whatever their walks of life, Catholics recognised the importance of re-considering current structures and practices of parishes and dioceses. They agreed with Pope Francis' words: “...if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be ‘the church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.’” (EG 28) The Report indicated the need for such ongoing renewal. During the COVID-19 pandemic, opportunities for diverse ways of connecting parishes to homes and broader community came to light, including digital platforms and collaborations with secular media outlets. At the same time, gaps in connection between members of parishes became more evident.

1 Pope Francis, “Extraordinary Moment of Prayer,” 27 March 2020. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200327_omelia-epidemia.html

2 Pope Francis, “Audience to Representatives of the Communications Media,” Address, 16 March 2013. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco_20130316_rappresentanti-media.html

3 Pope Francis, “Opening of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment,” Address, 3 October 2018. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/october/documents/papa-francesco_20181003_apertura-sinodo.html

Further, the Report and submissions express a restlessness regarding the role of women in Church life and ministry. Scripture proclaims that Jesus has a treasured place for women in his life and ministry. From generation to generation Jesus has called, loved, trusted, and empowered women for mission, beginning with Mary the Mother of God, and extending to Jarius young daughter, to Mary Magdalene, the other women at the tomb, Phoebe and Nympha. (Lk 2:19; John 2:5, 10:18, 20:11-18; Mark 5:41; Rom. 16: 1-2; Col. 4:15)

The Group discerned that Christ's Gospel sheds light on society's current needs. The Report and Listening and Discernment phases revealed that Catholics in Australia often agree on which issues are important, but regularly disagree on their nature and cause, and on how the Church should respond. The Plenary Council will need to address these diverse views, while seeking unity.

“Within the Church in Australia, renewal demands a cultural change: from power to service, from dominion to communion; from a triumphalist Church to a 'Church which is poor and for the poor.'”



The “call to conversion” is “the indispensable condition of Christian love.” (TMA 50) Christians respond to this call when they openly acknowledge personal and communal failings and experience the joy of reconciliation shaped by renewed relationship with the Trinitarian God. Ongoing conversion is the source of renewal and of authentic reform. Catholics in Australia experience the riches of the Church's traditions, through liturgy, parish life and the Church's contributions to welfare, education and healthcare. At the same time, they acknowledge hindrances to personal and institutional conversion toward Christ. The Report repeatedly refers to the Church's rites of reconciliation (particularly the Third Rite), indicating that the Church in Australia needs to respond to this desire for formation in, and access to, sacramental reconciliation.

One of the most significant obstacles to personal and communal reconciliation is a loss of trust both within and towards the Church. After the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Catholics need to be able to trust and be trusted as the People of God within Australia. The Commission's findings revealed a stark contradiction: alongside the good work of Catholics in Australia existed a culture agonisingly antithetical to the Gospel. The People of God need increased transparency, open communication, consultation and accountability at all levels. They recognise the demand to understand and practice synodality, which is the “involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the

Church.” (Synodality, 7) Only then can the Church learn from and reform those secular governance models that are consistent with the Gospel, and in certain instances have found their original impetus in Christian thinking and ethics.

Importantly, during Lent in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic spread globally and has required all Australian parishes to cease face-to-face ministry. Catholics can currently only participate in Mass remotely, via television or livestreaming, and there is minimal access to other sacraments. There is no timeline for when the Church can resume ministry as normal. One thing is certain: when that time comes, Australian Catholics and wider society will have different pastoral needs.

Christ's invitation into deeper communion with the Trinity calls us to forge new paths. As drought, bushfires and extreme weather become more common, we realise that our baptismal calling is away from indifference and towards God's mission of love to the whole of creation. The Church can become more open to “ecological conversion” by understanding and respecting how systems of life and love are deeply interconnected. Australia's political, secular discourse is at a tipping point and the local Church can stand as a sign of God's love for Creation, defying “structures of sin” (SRS 36) and embodying structures of social renewal. Moving toward a “civilisation of love” (SRS 34), the Church can inspire within our nation “greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world's problems” (LS 221). Acknowledging “our common home”, the Church

in Australia can also provide leadership by learning from Australia's first nations how to walk softly on this shared land.

This prophetic mission requires ongoing formation in the Christian faith. The Church in Australia can still do much to meet the desire of respondents for formation beyond short courses offered to children (and sometimes parents) and the engaged, during preparation for the sacraments. Catholics want support so that they can live as Christ's disciples, experiencing daily and communally the renewal of ongoing conversion.

Respondents also expressed the desire for more opportunities and encouragement for people to engage in all forms of ministry. The ordained ministry is treasured in the life of the Church. Catholic Australians want to be involved in ongoing discernment with the

universal Church about those who are eligible for that ministry. Nonetheless, they acknowledged that other ministries can be discovered, fostered and encouraged, to meet pastoral needs. Ongoing formation is crucial to deepening awareness of how the People of God in Australia can be disciples to the contemporary world.

The Report has also emphasised the pastoral need to embrace the diversity of the People of God. Catholics in Australia are passionate about the reception of sacraments, participation in liturgy, styles of liturgy and social issues. They often differ about how to respond to these. We are also challenged to see different races, sexual orientations and genders not as obstacles but rather as opportunities to grow in the life of charity. These possibilities require continued dialogue.

“Catholics want support so that they can live as Christ’s disciples, experiencing daily and communally the renewal of ongoing conversion.”



III. Theological Vision

“The kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15)

Jesus' call to conversion is a summons to place one's life at the service of God's kingdom, and to ever-closer discipleship of Jesus in the midst of the Church. Jesus' vision of God's kingdom on earth is described in his Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5-7), in his parables and teachings, in his ministry of mercy, healing and reconciliation.

Just as Jesus formed his first community of disciples to be a sign of God's kingdom, so after his resurrection the Lord continues to transform the hearts and minds of those who come to him in faith. As we encounter the Lord alive and present among us we, like Mary Magdalene, Peter and the other disciples, are transformed to be witnesses of his resurrection (Mk 16:10) and bearers of his mission in the world.

For God, who is at work in all creation, entrusts the mission of Jesus to the Church, the Body of Christ, animated by the Holy Spirit. The Second Vatican Council, learning from the ancient sources of Christian faith and history, strongly affirmed that the whole Church – people together with pastors – receive the living Word of God and are drawn into the mission of the church through the sacraments of initiation (SC 6; LG 7). Correcting an overly juridical and bureaucratic model of the Church, Vatican II insisted that through Baptism all believers participate in Christ's work as priest, prophet and king, exercising gifts of worship, of witness and of servant

leadership (AA 10). The gifts of the Spirit nurture every baptised person, so that we can answer the call to grow in holiness and maturity in the Christian life (LG 39). In this way, they will enter more deeply into the “joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties” (GS 1) of all people and of the earth; they will also be led to “go against the flow” (GE 65-66) witnessing to their encounter with Christ by lives of ever-deeper conversion to the gospel way of life.

As the community of disciples embodying the Beatitudes of Jesus (GE 67-93), the Church is an image of the Triune God, reflecting the features of the divine communion that have been revealed to us. The Gospel that the Church proclaims continually challenges its community to reflect the relational and missional characteristics of the divine Persons (AG 2) in its own historical form, embodying the participative, cooperative and self-sacrificing interaction of the Triune God. Continually returning to the way of the Gospel, the Church community renews and reforms its organisational structures and procedures to better reflect Jesus' ministry and teaching, and better to manifest the Church's living tradition.

The Church exists in history in the way of a pilgrim, journeying amidst afflictions and consolations towards the fullness of God's kingdom (LG 8). As Vatican II recalled, while on this journey the Church is in need of “continual reform” (UR 6). In every context, Christian believers and communities must be evangelised before evangelising, must listen before proclaiming, must be converted before proposing the way to others. They

must ensure that their message and activities express ever more effectively what Pope Francis has referred to as “the heart of the gospel” (EG 34-39): “the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead” (EG 36). Through a “wise and realistic pastoral discernment” (EG 33) Catholics will examine the Church’s language and concepts, structures and practices, laying aside those that have become obstacles to people hearing the Gospel, and renewing those that enhance people’s encounter with the Lord and his Church.

The Second Vatican Council taught that the Church undertakes this path of renewal and reform by “discerning the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel” (GS 4, 11) and by responding to those human and cultural realities that genuinely anticipate the good news of God’s kingdom. The Holy Spirit arouses the personal and communal *sensus fidei* to assist this pastoral discernment of what may be genuine expressions of the Gospel (LG 12).

Through prayerful discernment in the consultation phase of the Plenary Council, Catholics in Australia have drawn attention to some priorities in renewal of the church’s mission. These are:

- implementing a participatory, discerning and accountable system of governance and leadership at all levels of the Australian Church to ensure a culture of continual conversion, renewal and reform

“In responding to these calls for renewal and reform, the Church does not seek to make superficial adjustments to gain popularity or prestige. Rather, authentic reform arises from a cultural conversion, a change of heart”

- strengthening faith communities for a Gospel-motivated mission, taking into account changing demographics, resources and culture
- renewing our commitment to recognition of and reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and increasing the participation of Aboriginal Catholics and their culture in the life of the Australian Church
- recognising and enhancing the participation of women in the leadership and ministries of the church at all levels, and celebrating the distinctive expressions of discipleship that Catholic women bring to their communities;
- the promotion of an ‘integral ecology’ (LS 11) in which all life is received and cared for as God’s gift and as a responsibility the human community must shoulder for the sake of the coming generations.

In responding to these calls for renewal and reform, the Church does not seek to make superficial adjustments to gain popularity or prestige. Rather, authentic reform arises from a cultural conversion, a change of heart within the body of Christ, which increases the Church’s “fidelity to her own calling” (UR 6; EG 26).



Catholics in Australia have expressed an urgent sense that something needs to change in the Church and how it exists in society. However, the suggestions for change were numerous, diverse and often conflicting. This is perhaps the greatest challenge for the Plenary Council in relation to our theme: to respond pastorally to issues that tend to polarise Australian Catholics who want to be open to conversion, renewal and reform. In particular, these issues involve: women in the Church, eligibility for marriage and ordination, and the Rites of Reconciliation.

Our mandate was faithfully to discern, using the responses to the nationwide-consultation. One of our most significant challenges was the lack of a shared consensus among Catholics, even in matters of faith and morals. The Church faces the challenge of learning the practices of dialogue and appreciating diverse ideas and expressions of discipleship on the journey towards the fullness of truth. It is an ongoing challenge to humbly focus on the Good News of God’s saving love in Christ and discern where there may be an unbalanced concern for non-essential traditions (CCC 83).

A major challenge confronting the Catholic Church in Australia is the loss of credibility in the wake of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It is urgent that the Church reforms its procedures of governance and leadership to reflect the values and practices of the Gospel and at least meets civic standards of governance.

A further challenge is not only for leaders but for all members of the Catholic Church.

The consultation highlights the importance of a personal encounter with Christ as the basis of the life of faith, and the need for a supportive and faith-enriching Church community in which to deepen and live out our Catholic identity. Catholics sense a call for greater integration of faith and life, for discerning ways of discipleship — at home and at work, online and in local communities.

A related challenge is the need for greater access to resources for faith formation and spiritual growth, so that Catholics at all stages of life’s journey are nourished and equipped for their call. Particular needs were identified for those living the hardships and joys of marriage and family life.

Another challenge faced by most Catholics is the decline of participation in parish life. Parish schools remain strong, active evangelising communities, yet many struggle to remain embedded in their local Catholic communities. Based on current trends, almost all Australian parishes, and many dioceses, will face increasing challenges in terms of financial sustainability; demography; availability of ordained and other ministerial personnel; adequate administrative support; and strategic planning for mission. There is cause for hope, given that consultation shows a strong appreciation of the importance of parish life and a desire that parishes be vibrant, inclusive, outward-looking communities. Other religious communities and

ecclesial movements also enrich the life and witness of the Church through their distinctive charisms and ministries.

At the time of writing, the global COVID-19 pandemic threatens to affect industries and economies, increase unemployment and poverty, increase inequalities in education and increase loneliness and social isolation. The pandemic is also an opportunity to breathe life into our struggling parishes by increasing the methods and number of people providing pastoral support, prayer, faith development and outreach to the poor.

A significant challenge relating to the mission of the Church is the need to broaden, form and support the range of those who minister in parishes, dioceses and other Church activities. The consultation expressed widespread respect and warm appreciation for the ordained men working in parishes and dioceses, often under increasingly challenging circumstances. In the consultation, many called for an expansion of the discipline of ordination to include some who are not currently permitted – suitable married men and also women – to be appropriately trained for diaconate and/or the priesthood. This calls for a pastoral response. Most Catholics also welcome the ministry of laywomen and laymen, in pastoral ministry and leadership. It is imperative that the formation provided for ordinands and other recognised ministers motivates and prepares them to create safe, collaborative, respectful and professional working relations and environments.

Another challenge that Catholic communities face is the retention and support of young people in the life of the Church. Some adults are saddened and concerned by a breakdown in transmission of the faith to the next generations. Appreciative that some young people respond to the World Youth Day events locally and internationally, the consultation showed that Catholics also strongly desire to reach out to the many more who

do not participate actively in Church life. Young Catholics have called for Church leaders and ministers

to accompany and assist them in various ways, to face the challenges of discipleship. Our Youth face global changes, secularisation, a plurality of faith traditions, as well as the changing nature of work and employment conditions, and the opportunities and risks of emerging technologies and a digital culture.⁴ At the same time, as Pope Francis reminds us, young people must forge new paths of discipleship and lead the Church into the future. “The Church needs your momentum, your intuitions, your faith. We need them! And when you arrive where we have not yet reached, have patience to wait for us” (CV 299).

Finally, the consultation shows an increasing awareness among Catholics of the urgent challenge of working for an “integral ecology” connecting all aspects of our “common home”, the earth (LS 11). This must begin from stronger connections with First People Catholics with their spiritual sense of country and of custodial relationship for the earth. Aboriginal Catholics have called on the Plenary Council to increase cultural awareness for Church communities and ministers working with Indigenous Australians, faith formation opportunities designed for Aboriginal Catholics, and welcoming Aboriginal culture in the Church’s liturgy and life (NATSICC Recommendations to the Plenary Council). Australian Catholics need to hear again the clear voice of Pope John Paul II in Alice Springs: “You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you. And 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” (Address in Blatherskite Park, 1986).

In seeking to foster an integral ecology of life, the Church also promotes relationships of non-violent cooperation and mutual service between women and men. The Church needs to continue to foster respectful openness to people of diverse sexual orientation and gender consciousness. It requires deepening commitment to human life at all its stages and conditions of life, and

to our relations with the non-human world. It calls for responsibility in the current climate crisis and for the personal and public conversions needed to care for the environment of Australia and globally. Conversion to an integral ecology of life calls for a spirituality of gratitude and wonder, giving praise to the Creator and Giver of all that exists.

“The pandemic is also an opportunity to breathe life into our struggling parishes by increasing the methods and number of people providing pastoral support, prayer, faith development and outreach to the poor. ”

⁴ Synod of Bishops. *Final Report of the Synod on Youth: Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment*. 2018, chapters 1-2 <http://www.synod.va/content/synod2018/en/fede-discernimento-vocazione/final-document-of-the-synod-of-bishops-on-young-people--faith-an.html>

V. Prioritised Questions and Proposals for Change

The Discernment and Writing Group is strongly aware that the call for change expressed in the national consultation is primarily a call to a change of heart. Christ invites all Catholics in Australia to new attitudes and self-understandings, which better reflect the “mind of Christ” (Phil 2.11) and the ministry of God’s Kingdom, to which we are called by our Baptism. Only with this attitudinal and cultural change will any organisational change be truly effective or sustainable. Such change must include efforts to rebuild trust among Catholics, especially between leaders and people, and between the institutional Church and the Australian public.

1. Governance and Leadership for Ongoing Renewal and Reform

Questions

- How can Catholic governance and leadership bodies more effectively create and maintain an inclusive, synodal and discerning culture in the Church; and that motivates a Gospel-inspired mission both within Church communities and in the Catholic Church’s relations with a diverse and pluralistic Australian society?
- How can governance structures at all levels of the Catholic Church in Australia be enriched by the skills and faith commitment of all the baptised – ordained, religious and lay women and men – to foster participatory, accountable,

and visionary leadership for Church communities and organisations?

- How can Church authorities ensure a permanent and effective sharing of experience and competence in governance and leadership between the ACBC, CRA, peak bodies of Catholic health, education, social services agencies, NATSICC, and ministerial PJPs, as envisioned by the Royal Commission?

Proposals

It is anticipated that the Plenary Council will give significant consideration to the report of the ACBC’s Implementation Advisory Group Governance Review Project Team. If not dealt with in that report, the following matters should also be considered by the Plenary Council:

1. that the Plenary Council mandates the following for all levels of Church governance: (a) that the full range of consultative bodies and assemblies recognised in canon law be permanently established and convoked; (b) as frequently as the law recommends; (c) taking into consideration local needs and resources; (d) with the maximum participation of lay women and men, religious women and men, and clergy; (e) and, to the greatest extent possible, equitable participation of women
2. that the Plenary Council investigates ways to maximise the cooperation in Church

governance (cf. can. 129/2) of appropriately formed lay women and men, if necessary requesting the Holy See to revise relevant canons

3. that the Plenary Council expresses a commitment to the rights and responsibilities of all the baptised, and to the defence of rights as prescribed by canon law, including independent administrative processes of appeal at all levels of Church decision-making.
4. that the Plenary Council investigates the establishment of a national Catholic Governance Institute including representatives of the ACBC, CRA, Catholic agency peak bodies, NATSICC, ministerial PJPs, and Catholic higher education providers, to research and promote the theological and organisation principles and practices embodying high-quality performance in Church governance and administration.

2. Ministry for Mission as Disciples of Jesus

Questions

- How can vibrant and faith-nurturing Church communities grow while confronting the challenges of diminished participation and resources, demographic shifts, financial pressures, and fewer ordained and lay ministers? How can the Church in Australia assist all the baptised to grow and mature in holiness and discipleship (*LG 9-17, 39-42; GE 6-34*) through a richer participation in the communion of the Church?
- How can the structures and ministries of the local churches reach out and be more connected to today’s Catholics in their family life, communities, workplaces, culture and leisure? What can be learned

from the 2020 COVID-19 situation as pastoral leaders explore new ways of connecting households and individuals in a shared belonging and mission?

- How can a greater range of ministers – ordained and lay – be recognised, trained, deployed and evaluated in order to enliven local faith communities, to enrich the faith development of all Catholics and their families, and to strengthen the local Church’s mission of serving the Kingdom of God in context of Australian society?
- How ought the Plenary Council respond to the widespread call in the consultation to address and broaden the eligibility requirements for ordination?

Proposals

1. that the Plenary Council calls local churches and agencies to establish prayerful and participatory processes of ongoing reflection on and discernment of the signs of the times to more clearly identify their particular mission in the context of Australian society today.
2. that the Plenary Council investigates ways to better align the Church’s organisational structures, resources and personnel with the mission of the Church in each region or sector of Australian society, using evidence-informed approaches to building strong and healthy Church communities.
3. that the Plenary Council initiates a national decade of vocational discernment, to respond prayerfully to the calls to broaden the eligibility for ordination and the need for the identification of candidates, training and deployment of vocations to the priesthood and diaconate, to consecrated religious life, and vocations of lay women and men in roles of pastoral ministry, parish coordination and mission enhancement in local communities.

3. Becoming the Catholic Church with an Australian Face

Questions

- Striving to enculturate the Gospel in the soil of Australian life (GE 68-70), and to embody a Church “which is poor and for the poor” (GE 198), we ask:
- How well are Catholic institutions and communities responding the necessity of creating a safe Church committed to addressing the wounds of abuse in all its forms, in the light of the findings of the Royal Commission? In post-COVID-19 Australia, who are the newly-vulnerable people needing solidarity and support in the Church and in society?
- In what ways can the Plenary Council consider the importance of ecological conversion? That is, how can the Church in Australia foster recognising that awareness and responsibility for the “integral ecology” of life in our common home (LS 11) are not incidental to the Christian life, but are a constitutive feature of our baptismal call to holiness, in the particular setting of Australia’s regional relationships in Oceania?
- How can we ensure that the Catholic Church’s previous apologies to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for historical harm to persons and cultures by Catholic institutions are accompanied by sustained efforts of engagement with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sisters and brothers in the Church’s ongoing renewal and reform?
- What discerning conversations can be undertaken throughout the Church in Australia

to assist Catholics to respond in faith, hope and love to the societal shifts under way in the areas of marriage and family life, the relations of women and men in personal and public roles, the recognition and contribution of LGBTQ+ persons in society and the Church, the use of new technologies in relation to human persons and interactions? Can a plurality of views among Catholics in relation to the Church’s moral teaching become an opportunity for deeper faith and communion?

Proposals

1. that the Plenary Council continues to communicate with the people of Australia, particularly those affected by all forms of abuse by Church personnel, about the Church’s commitment to safety, healing and accountability at all levels of Catholic life, in light of the recommendations of the Royal Commission.
2. that the Plenary Council calls on all Church authorities and agencies to enact an integral ecology approach as articulated in *Laudato Si* and other Catholic Social Teaching.
3. that the Plenary Council establishes a national committee to implement the proposals outlined in the NATSICC Submission to the National Consultation, *Embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the life of the Catholic Church*.
4. that the Plenary Council commissions an renewed effort to examine how to implement the ACBC’s 1999 Report, *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*.

List of Abbreviations

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