

2020 Plenary Council

Let's Listen and Discern

How is God calling us to be Christ-centred Church that is:



Missionary and evangelising



Inclusive, participatory and synodal



Humble, healing and merciful



Prayerful and Eucharistic



A joyful, hope-filled and servant community



Open to conversion, renewal and reform

Welcome

Last year, we invited people from across the diocese, in parishes, schools, agencies and organisations, to participate in local Animator training for the for the Listening and Discernment process for the National Plenary Council and the Diocesan Synod.

Once again Local Animators will assist the diocesan community in the second stage of preparing for the Plenary Council of Listening and Discernment.

The national data from the Listening and Dialogue has now been collated under six themes, while asking the question:

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is:

1. Missionary and evangelising
2. Inclusive, participatory and synodal
3. Humble, healing and merciful
4. Prayerful and Eucharistic
5. A joyful, hope-filled and servant community
6. Open to conversion, renewal and reform

It is from this local communal Listening and Discernment that the agenda for the first session of the Plenary Council in October 2020, will be developed. The discernment process also involves establishing Writing and Discernment Groups for each of the National Themes for Discernment.

In this second phase, we are continuing to listen to what the Spirit is saying as we move from listening and dialogue, into listening and discernment. This is a process of Communal Discernment, rather than individual discernment. As such, we are called to work together as a group. The process that we will be using is built upon the practice of Spiritual Conversations. It is a process of prayer, contemplation, sharing with one another and seeking God's direction. As the Holy Spirit guides the Church in Australia, all are welcome to participate and discern together.

The Diocesan Plenary Council Core Team have identified two ways in which the people of our diocese might participate in Phase 2: Listening and Discernment to prepare for the 2020 Plenary Council and our own Diocesan Synodal Process.



Option One: Parish/Organisation - Listening and Discernment

Local Animators will be trained to offer six Listening and Discernment sessions, in small groups, over six weeks, covering each of the six themes in their parish, school or organisational setting. It is anticipated that each of these sessions will take about 2 hours.

Option Two: Local Conversations - Listening and Discernment

We acknowledge that some busy people may not wish or be able to participate in a six-week, weekly two-hour discernment process. A discernment guide is provided along with a printout for each of the six themes. These documents are available on our website. People will be invited to consider one of the themes during each of the six weeks of the diocesan Listening and Discernment process and gather with people at a convenient time to them, maybe after Mass, to respond to the questions.

An important part of discernment is listening to the voice of God within each one of us.

No matter the process chosen, people will be asked to respond to the following questions:

What actions could really help us to move toward becoming a Christ-centred Church that is:

(insert National Theme for Discernment):

- ▶ At the National Level
- ▶ At the Diocesan level
- ▶ At the local Parish level
- ▶ Personally

National Level – through the Plenary Council process. Groups will be asked to send the outcome of their Communal discernment (maximum of 150 words) to the Discernment and Writing Group who are considering the same National Theme for Discernment that the group has focused on.

Diocesan Level – through the Diocesan Synod process. Groups will be asked to send the outcome of their Communal discernment (maximum of 150 words) to the Diocesan Synod Working Party who will consider each of the National Themes for Discernment.

Parish and Personal Level - through the Parish process. A form to be downloaded from our website for people to complete to give to their Parish Leader.

Suggested program

Your local animator will be following the suggested program, this will ensure that responses are received by early November, so that they can be collated and analysed. Due to other commitments, some local animators may need to alter the suggested program.

WEEK BEGINNING	SESSIONS	THEME
22nd September	Introduction	Discernment, process and outcome
29th September	Week 1	Missionary and evangelising
13th October	Week 2	Inclusive, participatory and synodal
20th October	Week 3	Humble, healing and merciful
27th October	Week 4	Prayerful and Eucharistic
3rd November	Week 5	A joyful, hope-filled and servant community
10th November	Week 6	Open to conversation, renewal and reform
17 to 24 November	Responses	Submit responses to Plenary Council, Diocese and Local Parish

Discernment process

This process will begin with an Information Session about the data received from the National Listening and Dialogue session, discernment and the tool that will be used as part of the weekly Listening and Discernment gatherings. Part of this session will involve watching two informative videos which are on the Plenary Council website.

Local animator sessions will use the Plenary Council tool and each of the sessions will be from 2-2.5 hours. We have provided a program which avoids the school holidays.

This Listening and Discernment Tool consists of:

- ▶ The Plenary Council Prayer and Song
- ▶ A Guide for Discernment – *Listening with the Ear of the Heart*
- ▶ The Plenary Council *Let's Listen and Discern Tool*
- ▶ Scripture for each of the National Themes
- ▶ The Snapshot Report for each of the National Themes



Plenary Council Prayer

*Come, Holy Spirit of Pentecost.
Come, Holy Spirit of the great South Land.*

*O God, bless and unite all your people in Australia
and guide us on the pilgrim way of the Plenary Council.*

*Give us the grace to see your face in one another
and to recognise Jesus, our companion on the road.*

*Give us the courage to tell our stories
and to speak boldly of your truth.*

*Give us ears to listen humbly to each other
and a discerning heart to hear what you are saying.*

*Lead your Church into a hope-filled future,
that we may live the joy of the Gospel.*

*Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
bread for the journey from age to age.*

Amen.

*Our Lady Help of Christians, pray for us.
St Mary MacKillop, pray for us.*



Plenary Council Core Team

- ▶ Teresa Brierley – Director Pastoral Ministries
- ▶ Sr Louise Gannon rsj - Diocesan Co-ordinator of Liturgy
- ▶ Bernadette Gibson – Acting Head of Religious Education and Spirituality Services
- ▶ Brian Lacey – Acting Assistant Director – Catholic Schools Office
- ▶ Anne Heaney – Education Officer (Secondary Religious Education and Spirituality Services)
- ▶ Brad Fuller - Education Officer (Primary Religious Education and Spirituality Services)
- ▶ Mark Spencer - Education Officer (Primary Religious Education and Spirituality Services)
- ▶ Andrew Slater - Education Officer (Spirituality and Faith Formation)
- ▶ Sr Laretta Baker rsj – Process Facilitator

The members of the Core Team can be contacted through Teresa Brierley – Director Pastoral Ministries by E: Teresa.brierley@mn.catholic.org.au or P: (02) 4979 1157.



“Listen”

*Music and lyrics written by Peter Pellicaan
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It is time to hear God speak once again
Through the Word and through each other anew
Of a Church that shines love’s light to the world
Of a Church that looks like Jesus

Chorus

Let’s listen to what the Spirit is saying,
The voice that brings peace and sets hearts on fire.

It is time for love to shine like the dawn
Through the Church to all that hunger for life Revealing
Christ in all his glory and grace
Bringing joy and giving life

Chorus

Let’s listen to what the Spirit is saying
The voice that brings peace and sets hearts on fire

Final Chorus

Let’s listen to what the Spirit is saying
The voice that brings peace and sets hearts on fire
Let’s fall to our knees, let us be praying
and listen to what the Spirit is saying



Discernment

Listening with the ear of the heart

Ten Theological Principles were developed as part of the 1992/93 Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle Synod. These Theological Principles continue to provide our understanding of who we are as the people of God in this time and place.

The eighth principle is **Decision-making by Discernment**.

In keeping with what it means to be and to build Church, we seek to arrive at decisions which all can accept gracefully and support wholeheartedly (even if some wish the decision had been different) because they know the group honestly searched together for the Spirit of God in and for the life of the community.

Discernment of the Spirit ... listens to others so as to learn, is sensitive to all approaches, encourages collaboration rather than competition and aims not at majority vote but consensus. It recognises that each participant has a part of the truth and a share of the wisdom by reason of each one's unique experience of God in life, union with Christ and gifts of the Spirit. The process also recognises the right of each person to contribute his or her part without which the whole picture will not be presented and the whole wisdom of the spirit will not be available. (Archbishop F Carroll, Canberra-Goulburn Synod, 1989)

Personal Discernment

A Practical Guide

*Jesus said to the disciples,
"If you love me and obey the command I give you,
I will ask the One who sent me to give you another Advocate
to be with you always – the Spirit of Truth...who abides with you
and will be in you. (Jn. 14:15-17).*

The life of discipleship is, in essence, life in the Spirit "as sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ"¹. As we try to live this discipleship, we find ourselves engaged in making choices, both in the circumstances of every day and at crucial turning points of life. These choices give shape and direction to our lives.² Discernment offers us one way of making choices - in a context of prayer and a life orientation towards God. This means consciously tuning into the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth who lives within each one of us. It means using our best human abilities to think and reflect; to analyse and critique; to look at the 'big picture' of one's life, one's family, one's commitments, one's health, etc. all the while listening to the promptings of God's Holy Spirit within one's heart. Discernment takes time, energy and stamina. It is not for the faint hearted!

¹ Walter Principe. *Towards Defining Spirituality*. Studies in Religion.vol.12, no.2, pp127-141.

² David Lonsdale. *Listening to the Music of the Spirit*. Darton, Longman & Todd. London.1992.p19



A simple, step-by-step guide to personal discernment follows:

- ▶ Come to quiet; still your mind and try to put aside the busy-ness of the day *e.g. take a couple of deep, rhythmic breaths or repeat a one or two word prayer and let it drift off into silence.*
- ▶ Rest in the silence for a few moments
- ▶ Be aware that God's Spirit is within you and simply, in prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to help you listen and discern what God calls you to do and be.
- ▶ Identify clearly what is the question/matter/choice before you – what does God want of me here? What is the choice before me?
- ▶ Watch and see what arises in your heart – thoughts, feelings, further questions etc.
- ▶ Ask yourself where are those thoughts and feelings coming from – e.g. your own experiences, someone else's influence, some personal fear, hesitation, uncertainty, anxiety etc.
- ▶ Be aware of any pre-conceived views, prejudices and/or biases you may be holding.
- ▶ Listen calmly to what's happening within you. You have the moment of grace within you. Just be attentive to the thoughts and feelings that rise within you.
- ▶ Notice where you don't understand; where you are feeling unsure and/or confused. What questions are triggered in you?
- ▶ Begin to sort out your feelings, thoughts, images, scenarios, consequences, questions e.g. are they coming from God, from self, from others, from other influences? *Sometimes it helps to write a little.*
- ▶ Recall the situation/matter you are discerning, in terms of choice, what are you being drawn to? Sometimes it helps to think about 'pros' and 'cons' e.g. make two columns; in the pro column, list as many reasons that come to mind for your potential choice. In the con column. List reasons against proceeding in that direction.
- ▶ Reflect on each list in turn, beginning with the *cons*. As you think of other *pros* and *cons*. Add them to their respective lists.
- ▶ Notice how the situation/matter appears in the light of your reflection.
- ▶ Begin to assess your options thus:
 - o What course of action flowed most freely?
 - o Which one excited you the most?
 - o Which seemed 'right' to you?
- ▶ Renew your desire to follow God's call.
- ▶ Make your decision.
- ▶ Now hold your tentative decision together with your desire to follow God's call. Notice what happens.

- ▶ How does the decision feel to you? *If you are feeling at peace, at ease, refreshed within yourself or even, if you sense some initial unease that, in a little while softens, you can be fairly sure that you are moving beyond yourself and listening to God within you.*
- ▶ If you are not yet ready to make even a tentative decision, be at peace; let your response evolve over time. No need to rush to a conclusion. You may need more information; you may need more time for prayer and/or silence. You'll know! The response is usually already in your heart. The question here is what God wants me to do!
- ▶ When you are done, make a simple prayer of gratitude to God and be at peace. We know that *"all things work together unto good for those who love God"* (Rom.8:28)

Group Discernment A Practical Guide

*"Where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them" (Mt. 18:20).*

Group or communal discernment transfers to a group setting the method of personal discernment outlined previously. So, the explicit purpose of group discernment and therefore, the group's primary focus of attention is to find 'the will of God', to discover and follow where God's Holy Spirit is leading the group. In today's church and world, there are often occasions when a systematic process of group discernment is needed, a process which a group can use and adapt to its own circumstances.

The process of genuine group discernment is characterised by a few definite features:

1. Each member believes that God's Holy Spirit is present and active in every other member and they commit to search for what God is saying through each person.
2. Each comes with open mind and heart, ready to listen without judgment, to hold ideas lightly, and to receive others' views respectfully.
3. There is a considerable level of trust within the group, which allows people to speak freely, openly and honestly and to share their insights and gifts generously.
4. Each person has the opportunity to state clearly what s/he wishes to say both for and against all the options in question.
5. Members share faith, listen more than speak, and let go of their own agendas.
6. They stop judging and preparing arguments in their heads.
7. At times they sit in silent prayer together.
8. Members may be expected to have engaged in their own individual discernment, before the group comes together.
9. The group has a leader/facilitator, and often, a secretary.

It is important that each member is committed to the process and both knows and accepts the ground rules in advance. Agreement about the meaning and limits of confidentiality is essential.



A simple step-by-step process of Group Discernment follows:

- ▶ The leader/facilitator welcomes members, outlines the matter at hand and clarifies any misunderstandings.
- ▶ The leader (or his/her appointee) invites the group to come to silence and pray together.
- ▶ After prayer, the leader/facilitator names the matter at hand and invites each member to share his/her wisdom - reflections, ideas, insights questions, unease if any. This sharing is usually the result of members' individual discernment.
- ▶ Members listen intently and receive each other's contributions in silence. A time of reflection follows each speaker, when members recall significant points (perhaps making a note of these, in order to aid memory). There is no discussion.
- ▶ As they listen and receive from others, each person is alert to any movement toward change in their earlier thinking.
- ▶ The leader/facilitator is alert to times when the group might need a period of silent prayer.
- ▶ When each member of the group has spoken, or indicated that s/he passes, members are invited to share what has been significant for them, as they listened. Clarification, questioning and discussion may follow. There is no rush!
- ▶ The leader/facilitator is alert for areas of agreement/disagreement and seeks to discover and articulate "the mind of the group".
- ▶ If there does not seem to be agreement, a further time of silent prayer may follow, and members are then invited to share, again, any new, clear, insightful reflections.
- ▶ This step is repeated until the group is satisfied that sufficient agreement has been reached.
- ▶ Gradually, the group will see and hear a common direction emerging.
- ▶ The leader/facilitator summarises the direction/decision(s) reached.
- ▶ The secretary details the direction/decision(s) of the group.
- ▶ The leader thanks group members for their participation and invites people to a prayer of thanksgiving.





Where a group is larger than ten members, a series of small groups is usually formed. The process, as outlined, is followed by each small group, and, when the small group work is completed, the whole group comes together; the small group leaders report on the conclusions of their group's discernment; if necessary, clarification, questioning and discussion may follow.

Then the following steps are repeated within the whole group:

- ▶ The leader/facilitator is alert for areas of agreement/disagreement and seeks to discover and articulate “the mind of the group”.
- ▶ If there does not seem to be agreement, a further time of silent prayer may follow, and members are then invited to share, again, any new, clear, insightful reflections.
- ▶ This step is repeated until the group is satisfied that sufficient agreement has been reached.
- ▶ Gradually, the group will see and hear a common direction emerging.
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- ▶ The leader thanks group members for their participation and invites people to a prayer of thanksgiving.

In all our discernment what matters is hearing and heeding the voice of God's Holy Spirit. When we listen, we hear that distinctive voice that Jesus promised us, the Spirit of Truth, to be with us always. The Holy Spirit is the Reign of God in our hearts. All is sheer grace!

(The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle acknowledges the work of Josephite Sister, Laretta Baker, in compiling this guide.)

¹Much of this thinking is based on the work of David Lonsdale sj and Mary Margaret Funk osb. David Lonsdale. *Listening to the Music of the Spirit*. Darton, Longman & Todd. London. 1992. Mary Margaret Funk. *Discernment Matters*. Liturgical Press. Collegeville. 2012.

Let's Listen & Discern



How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is:



Missionary and
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Inclusive, participatory
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Humble, healing and
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Prayerful and
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A joyful, hope-filled and
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Open to conversion,
renewal and reform

Welcome

Thank you for participating in the second phase of preparing for the Plenary Council 2020. In this phase, we are continuing to listen to what the Spirit is saying as we move from listening and dialogue, into listening and discernment.

This is a process of Communal discernment, rather than individual discernment. As such, we are called to work together as a group. The process you are going to engage with today is built upon the practice of Spiritual Conversations¹. It is a process of prayer, contemplation, sharing with one another and seeking God's direction. As the Holy Spirit guides the Church in Australia, all are welcome to participate and discern together.

¹Spiritual Conversations is a part of the process of Communal discernment. The practice outlined in these pages is drawn from primarily from the Ignatian tradition of the Spiritual Exercises as well as other resources and practices of discernment.

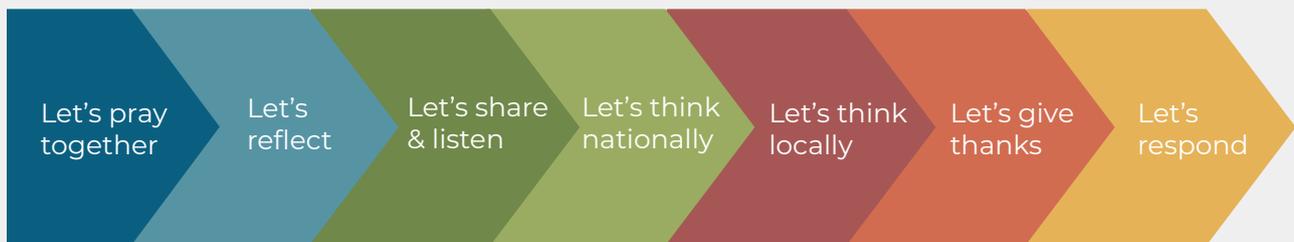
Let's prepare

As a group, choose one of the National Themes for Discernment your small group is going to focus on for your Listening & Discernment experience.

Ensure that all people in the group have the following resources:

- The Snapshot Report or the relevant section from the Final Report for your selected National Theme for Discernment
- The Listening and Discernment guide
- Scripture passage related to the National Theme for Discernment
- Notepad and pen / Personal journal

The Listening & Discernment experience



Time/Duration: 2 – 2.5 hours.
Number of participants: Maximum 10-12 per group.
Suggested location: Anywhere quiet.

Let's gather & pray together

1

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live, and we recognise their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and honour them for their sacrifice and stewardship.

Gathering Prayer

You may like to say together the prayer provided below, pray the Plenary Council prayer or just speak to God from your heart. See more prayer resources on the Plenary Council webpage here: <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/pray/>

✠ Lord,
You once told us,
'Just as you did it to one of the least of these, who are members of my family, you did it to me.'
May our eyes be opened to the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick and imprisoned.
May our minds be freed from the bounds of self-interest, fear and prejudice.
May our hearts be moved to recognise and respond to the needs of your people.
May we be open to the fruits of your Spirit, so that our thoughts, words and actions can be infused with love, peace, compassion and selflessness.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord.
Amen.



5 mins

Let's reflect

2

Listening to scripture

Choose your scripture readings from the guide provided, these relate to each National Theme for Discernment. Ensure each group member has access to the scripture text during the reflection time.

1. One person from the group reads the Scripture passage aloud.
2. After 2 minutes of silence, a second person from the group reads the Scripture passage aloud again.

Individual silent reflection

For at least 20 minutes, take time to reflect individually in silence, pray with the scripture passage you have heard, and reflect on the information about the National Theme for Discernment your group is focused on.

During this time of silence, consider the questions below. You may wish to journal, to draw or simply sit quietly with your thoughts.

*How is God speaking to you in this scripture and all that you have read?
What words or phrases are you being drawn to and why?
How do you feel?*



20 mins

Let's share & listen

Spiritual Conversations

This practice of Spiritual Conversations is taken from the Ignatian tradition. It is a part of the Communal discernment process and provides a way for groups of people to listen to God, by listening to one another. It is a way for us to listen to the voice of the Spirit.

After your time of individual silent reflection, regather together as a group, sitting in a circle.

Sharing & listening, Round 1

Each person in the circle takes 2-3 minutes to share aloud with the group the fruits of your individual prayer, and say how you are feeling using the lead-in statements below.

Anyone in the group can begin, and the person on their left is the next person to share. Continue clockwise around the circle, until each person in the group has had their turn.

When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart.

*"In my prayer today...
And I feel..."*



3 mins
per
person

Reflect

Once everybody has shared, the whole group reflects in silence for 5 minutes. During this time, think about what you have heard the people in your group say, and ask yourself: *"What am I hearing the Holy Spirit saying to us?"*



5 mins



Sharing & listening, Round 2

Each person in the circle takes 2 minutes to share with the group from their reflection. What have you heard the Spirit saying in the voices of the group? Use the lead-in statements below.

This time when sharing, do not add anything new to the conversation – just your response to what you have heard already shared.

*“Listening to the Holy Spirit through the voices of this group,
I have heard...”
“And it leaves me feeling...”*



15 mins

Reflect

Once everybody has shared, the whole group reflects in silence for 5 minutes. During this time, think about how you are feeling and about your experience of prayer and listening today.



5 mins

Sharing & listening, Round 3

This third round of sharing and listening is open, less structured than the previous two rounds. The purpose of open conversation is to deepen your encounter with one another. Any person who wants to speak is invited to share. During this time, remember to listen deeply when someone else is speaking, and to respond to the conversation with an open and kind heart.

In light of all you have experienced today, share your thoughts and feelings with the group. When sharing, you might like to begin with these words:

*From my prayer today and listening to the voices of the group,
I feel...*



15 mins

When the time is right, close the conversation by saying thank you to one another for sharing and invite everyone to enjoy a short break. Remember to note the time to get back together after the break.

Break Time



15 mins

Let's think nationally

Reflect

The whole group reflects in silence for 5 minutes. During this time, think about the concrete, practical steps which could be taken to move forward in the thematic area you have been focused on today.



5 mins

For example: If you have been discerning *participatory and synodal* ways of engaging young people, some practical suggestions might be to form a state-based peer-to-peer encounter network for young parents, or explore the development of an online faith platform to support young people's mental health, church partnership with Beyond Blue etc. Consider the questions below and write your ideas on paper or post-it notes.

- How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church in Australia that is (insert: National Theme for Discernment)? Consider some examples of good practice or programs, locally, nationally or globally that you are aware of that could be explored.

Sharing & listening

Each person in the circle takes 2-3 minutes to share their ideas with the group. If you have used Post-It notes, place these in the centre of the group as you speak about them.



10 mins

Anyone in the group can begin, and the person on their left is the next person to share. Continue clockwise around the circle, until each person in the group has had their turn.

When others are sharing their ideas, remember to listen with an open and humble heart. You can ask the person sharing about their idea for understanding, and be sure to resist critique.

Group discussion, towards decision

Once everyone has shared their ideas for action, your group's task is to identify 2 or 3 emerging actions that can form the group's submission to the theme's Discernment and Writing Group.



20 mins

Below are some questions to guide your group's discernment:

What actions do we feel strongly called towards?

What actions could really help us to move toward becoming a Christ-centred Church that is (insert National Theme for Discernment)?

What is the most loving response that the Spirit is calling us to?

Remember, these actions need to be:

- clear
- stated as a positive
- as specific as possible
- a real action (practical, achievable and measurable)

Write down the 2 or 3 emerging actions that have been drawn from the discussions. **Your group can submit these to the Discernment and Writing Group for the theme being discerned, at the end of this session.**

Reflect

An important part of discernment is listening to the voice of God within each one of us. This means we need to take notice of how we are feeling.



5 mins

Before submitting your group's response, take some time to reflect and pray individually on the emerging actions the group has identified. Ask God for a feeling of *consolation* – a feeling of peace or fullness of your heart about your decision.

How do I feel about our proposed actions, our group decision?

Let's think locally

5

Take some time now, as a group to discuss any ideas which might be acted upon locally, in your own lives, in parishes, communities or schools or in other parts of your local neighbourhood.



20 mins

Think about who you can collaborate with locally. You can speak with your Parish Priest or another community faith leader such as the Principal or parent leader at school, or local youth leaders, about your proposed ideas.

This part is your call to faith in action, living out the Gospel for God's mission.

What ideas do we have that can nourish our local faith community?



6

Let's give thanks

You may like to say together the prayer provided below, or pray the Plenary Council prayer, or just speak to God from your heart

Gracious God,
Through our experience of discernment,
you invited each of us
to hear the Holy Spirit in the voices of
others,
to challenge our own will, desires, fears and
prejudices and to be open to your will.

Lord Jesus, thank you for guiding us
as our beacon of light, truth and life
so that we can clearly see how best to
honour and serve you, our neighbours
and our true selves.

We pray that our decisions today
have stayed true to you
and to the faith and trust
that you have in us.

Through this experience,
may the Holy Spirit ignite
feelings of joy, and deeper faith,
greater hope and trust,
greater love and peace,
greater courage and compassion
in each of us and in your holy Church
as we journey forward together.
Amen ✠



5 mins

7

Let's respond

Your group can send the outcomes of your Communal discernment (maximum 150 words) to the **Discernment and Writing Group** who are considering the same National Theme for Discernment that you have focused on in your group. You will find the link on the Plenary Council webpage under Discernment.

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/listening-and-discernment/>

Thank you sincerely for continuing to engage in the Plenary Council process as we move toward the future God is calling us to.



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Let's Listen & Discern



To prepare for your small group discernment experience, as you consider the question: *How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is missionary and evangelising*, your group will begin by praying with the Scriptures. Choose one of the Scripture readings below for your small group discernment experience.

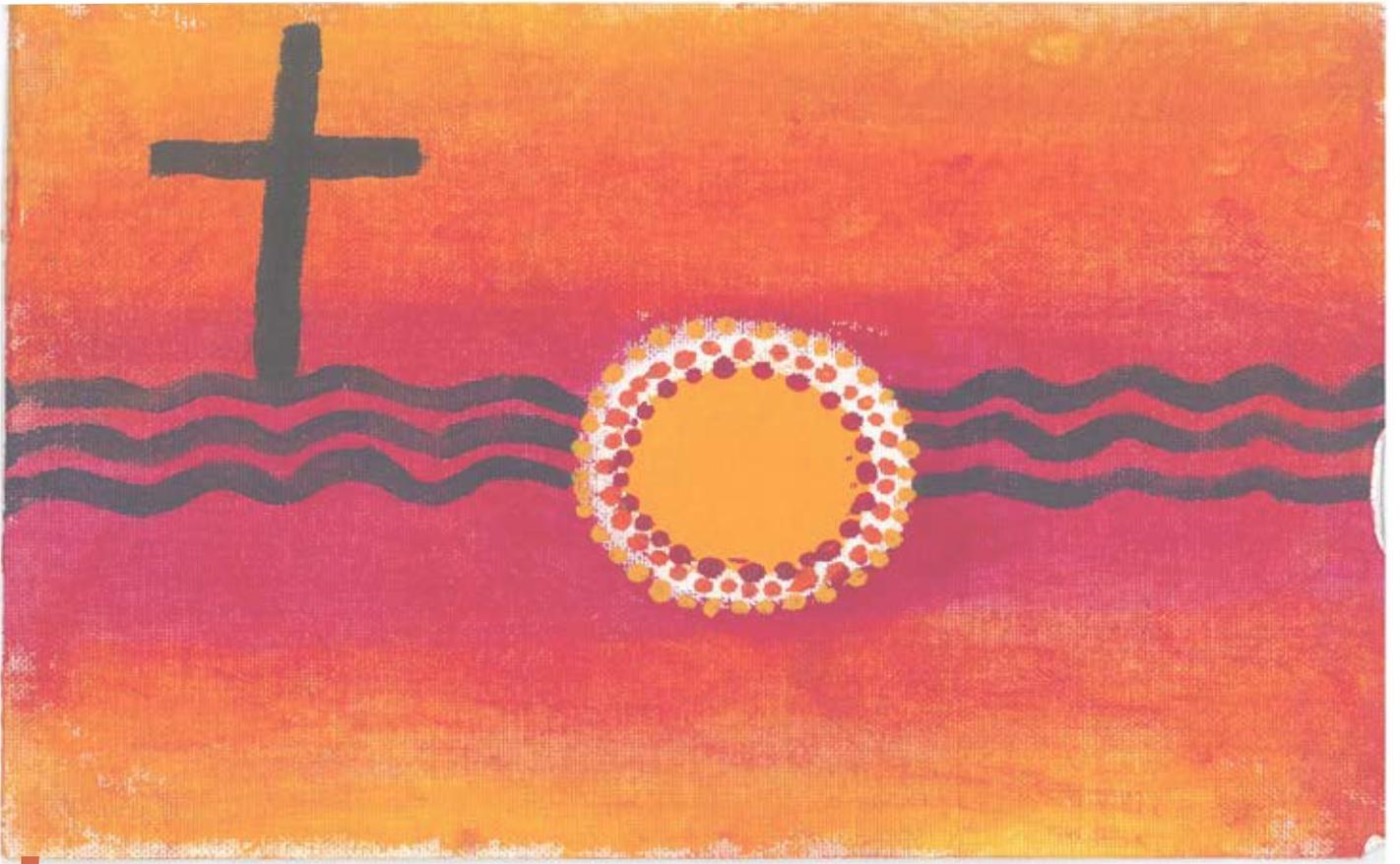
Missionary and evangelising

Luke 10:1-12

The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.”

Matthew 10:5-15

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics,



Art by Sascha Davies

or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.”

Luke 24:44-49

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”



Snapshot Report

How is God calling us to be a
Christ-centred Church that is:

**MISSIONARY AND
EVANGELISING**



AS WE MOVE INTO THIS SECOND STAGE OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL JOURNEY, WE CONTINUE TO SEEK THE WISDOM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Beginning in July 2019, we are invited to reflect on Scripture, Church teaching and our contemporary situation in order to discern the answer to this question: How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is missionary and evangelising? The fruits of what is discerned during this time will help shape the agenda of the first session of Plenary Council in October 2020.

This National Theme for Discernment is inspired by the voices of the People of God who shared a passion for participating in the missionary nature of the Church and desire stronger support, involvement and formation among all the baptised who make up the Church. The data also identified the need to reach out and communicate more effectively and to find new ways of living and proclaiming the Gospel in Australia today. There was a call for the strengthening of leadership and ministries in parishes and schools, training to equip leaders for ministry, pastoral support for various groups within parish and faith communities, and a desire for a unified voice in engaging social issues such as life and religious freedom.

TOPICS: WHAT DID PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?

People spoke about a number of different topics in **PHASE 1: LISTENING & DIALOGUE**. A comprehensive report on all the voices of participants will be released on **JULY 28, 2019**.

Below are some of the topics that informed this particular theme, which was created through a combination of analysis, discernment and prayer.

- Affordable adult faith formation courses
- Authentic faith teaching in Catholic schools
- Be a witness in society
- Better communication of what the Church does
- Better faith formation
- Better formation for liturgical ministries and sacramental programs
- Better homilies
- Better preparation and support for married couples
- Better selection and formation of candidates to priesthood
- Better teachers in Catholic schools
- Better training and support for youth leaders
- Better youth faith formation
- Church should adapt to multicultural reality
- Church to act as a guide for Australian society
- Concerns for diminishing parish communities
- Defend Religious Freedom
- Defend right-to-life issues
- Encourage vocations
- End celibacy, allow priests to be married
- Establish more youth programs
- Evangelisation in and of the family
- Faith formation for parents
- Fight for human rights issues
- Focus on mission, being missionary disciples
- Focus on the new evangelisation
- Greater connection with and inclusion of Indigenous Australians
- Greater focus on Jesus Christ
- Greater focus on permanent deacons
- Greater focus on the Word of God
- Greater leadership from Bishops
- Greater leadership from priests
- Greater role for women
- Greater support for RCIA
- Greater trust, faith and hope in God
- Keep the commandments
- Keep the faith
- Listen to one another more
- Listen to the Holy Spirit
- More chaplains, youth ministers in Catholic schools
- More formation for priests
- Outreach to all the baptised
- Outreach to the wider community
- Putting Gospel values in action
- Remain faithful to Church teaching
- Remain faithful to Church teaching on marriage
- Share the faith with others
- Use social media to engage people
- Welcome back priests who have left to marry

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

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

“We are asked to be Missionary Disciples to do God’s mission as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus. To encourage and lead young families, by example, to the church. To model a Catholic life in our families, school and communities. To pray often”.

“More formation & teaching needed for the Mass/Eucharist for young people”.

“ How will the Good News be proclaimed?

These days, most Catholics do not go to church, so do not hear any teachings from the pulpit. Therefore, the bishops must use any and all means of communication to spread the Good News – perhaps a weekly newspaper column, a blog, a ten-minute TV session once a week, and using social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook). Of course, the world will object, but that doesn’t matter – at least people would know where the Catholic Church stands on

“I feel God is calling us to listen to each other and work together”.

“Have faith that He will keep His promise to be with us. And trusting in God’s grace, the Holy Spirit given to us, to go out and make disciples for Jesus Our Lord and teach them to do the same. Humbly renew our own encounter with the mercy and compassion of God in Jesus, to be forgiven and healed, and to be set free to encounter our world with that same mercy and compassion”.

“Based on the Gospel ‘that penance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, unto all nations’, that we should love our neighbour, love God and follow the commandments.

My suggestions and comments on how I think we can live this out: To bring more people into the Church - stronger catechesis at schools and parishes ... Greater emphasis on the sacraments. Confession is vital for people to receive the mercy of God and have their sins forgiven - as such, people need to know why confession is necessary, and more times available to access this sacrament would be helpful. People need to learn apologetics and be prepared to evangelise and also defend the faith ”.

“God is asking us to be accepting of refugees and to understand and reach out to our indigenous people and those that are marginalised. God wants us to stop taking and to start giving”.

“I think that God is asking of us down here in Australia to be attentive towards Christian persecution and religious freedom, especially as our nation is becoming more secular. In relation, I also believe He is asking us to defend our faith and not be afraid to say that we are Christians”.

“...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem...and to the ends of the earth.”

(ACTS 1:8)

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What questions do you have about the future of Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

“How can the Church go about changing societal values on abortion and other life issues?”

“Are we giving enough support for parents as the primary educators of their children in the faith?”

“How can we focus more on families, welcoming them and involving them? They are the Church of tomorrow?”

“Who is evangelising the evangelisers?”

“How can the Church go about reinforcing Church teaching within our own congregations?”

“How do we get people to return to prayer when we live in such a fast paced life?”

“How do we deal with the lack of clergy available to celebrate communion at some parishes and some schools?”

“How can the Church support the faith of its school and other teacher?”

A SNAPSHOT OF

Your Stories of Faith

CHACKO

60 YEARS OLD, ADELAIDE

I was ordained a Priest [in] 1985 and left active ministry in 2005. I and my wife migrated to Australia for higher studies in 2005, and are well settled in life with professional jobs and active ministry participation in the Catholic faith. I would welcome the opportunity to return to the priesthood, as I come with a deeper and broader understanding of life, of the joys and struggles being experienced by the people and communities I would be serving. I have an enhanced wisdom of life prompted by the signs of the times that bring strong connections to families and communities.



PATRICIA

71 YEARS OLD, BRISBANE

I love my Catholic faith, and live it every day. Without the Eucharist in Mass and listening to the homily, I would find life more difficult. Our western world leads many people on the wrong paths in life, and if they have no guidance from our church leaders, we will see empty pews in our churches. Especially under 55's. Our Catholic schools must prepare our students to be more active in the practice of their faith, and to resist the temptations that await them in the wider world. Our young people want the Church to be more inclusive of both men and women. And to realise, also, that they, the youth, have had little exposure to what the Church offers as in previous generations. Change must come.



VINCENT

23 YEARS OLD, PARRAMATTA

When I was in year 11, I went to a 14-day retreat. We had daily Holy Hours, prayed the Rosary, listened to many talks, went on street evangelisation and door knocking, observed times of silence and still managed to play games and do fun activities as well. As a shy person, I found it challenging to talk to others and especially when I went door knocking. But everyone was so welcoming and charitable that upon reflection, I realised I'd found a pocket of hope in a world of despair. It changed my life because although I intellectually understood that God loved me, having been taught this at school, at the retreat I truly felt His love in my heart. It was the love and charity everyone had for each other and for me that touched me and helped me to see and tangibly feel God's love for me.





UPCOMING REPORTS:

Inclusive, participatory and synodal
Prayerful and Eucharistic
Humble, healing and merciful
A Joyful, hope-filled and servant community
Open to conversion, renewal and reform

JUNE 23, 2019
JUNE 30, 2019
JULY 7, 2019
JULY 14, 2019
JULY 21, 2019

Please note this report contains only a snapshot of thousands of stories and responses shared. A comprehensive report on the voices of participants will be released on July 28, 2019.

<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au>

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 Plenary Council

Let's Listen & Discern



To prepare for your small group discernment experience, as you consider the question: *How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is inclusive, participatory and synodal*, your group will begin by praying with the Scriptures. Choose one of the Scripture readings below for your small group discernment experience.

Inclusive, participatory and synodal

Galatians 3:23-29

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another

gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Matthew 23:1-12

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”





Snapshot Report

How is God calling us to be a
Christ-centred Church that is:

**INCLUSIVE,
PARTICIPATORY
AND SYNODAL**



AS WE MOVE INTO THIS SECOND STAGE OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL JOURNEY, WE CONTINUE TO SEEK THE WISDOM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Beginning in July 2019, we are invited to reflect on Scripture, Church teaching and our contemporary situation in order to discern the answer to this question: How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is inclusive, participatory and synodal? The fruits of what is discerned during this time will help shape the agenda of the first session of Plenary Council in October 2020.

This National Theme for Discernment is inspired by the voices of the People of God who expressed a desire for individuals and groups within and also beyond the Church to find a better welcome and be incorporated more into her life and mission. There was a call to renew forms of governance and leadership in the Church, to find ways formally and informally of being co-responsible for ministry and mission, seeking structures and processes of collaboration, shared decision-making and financial co-responsibility in order to enable this greater involvement of lay people particularly of women, young people, people of diverse cultural backgrounds and people with disabilities. There was an expressed need for stronger connections across the many parts of the Church, and with other Christian traditions.

TOPICS: WHAT DID PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?

People spoke about a number of different topics in [PHASE 1: LISTENING & DIALOGUE](#). A comprehensive report on all the voices of participants will be released on [JULY 28, 2019](#).

Below are some of the topics that informed this particular theme, which was created through a combination of analysis, discernment and prayer.

- A voice in the selection and appointment of bishops
- Affordable adult faith formation courses
- Baby Boomer generation to listen to young Catholics
- Become a Vatican II church
- Better communication of what the Church does
- Better implementation of Royal Commission Recommendations
- Better interface between parish and school
- Better Plenary Council process
- Better preparation and support for married couples
- Better selection and formation of candidates to priesthood
- Better teachers in Catholic schools
- Better use of finances
- Care for neighbour
- Care for the environment
- Care for the family
- Church should adapt to multicultural reality
- Communion for all
- Concerns for diminishing parish communities
- Creation of small communities/groups within parishes
- Cultural Masses
- Defend right-to-life issues
- Diocesan Pastoral Council
- End celibacy, allow priests to be married
- End Clericalism
- End discrimination of LGBTQ
- Establish more youth programs
- Evangelisation in and of the family
- Faith formation for parents
- Fight for human rights issues
- Focus on Ecumenism
- Greater access to Mass and Reconciliation
- Greater connection with and inclusion of Indigenous Australians
- Greater focus on Jesus Christ
- Greater focus on permanent deacons
- Greater focus on the Word of God
- Greater inclusion of all people
- Greater involvement of the laity
- Greater leadership from priests
- Greater recognition of Eastern Catholic Churches
- Greater role for women
- Greater trust, faith and hope in God
- Hierarchy to listen to the laity
- Importance of Communion services in rural parishes
- Inclusion of the divorced and remarried
- Laity supporting priests
- Lay-led parishes
- Lay-led liturgies and Masses
- Listen to one another more
- Mass to be appealing to youth and children
- Modernise Church teachings
- More chaplains, youth ministers in Catholic schools
- More formation for priests
- More transparency and accountability regarding clergy sexual abuse
- More welcoming parishes
- New leadership and governance model
- New model of Church, diocese, parish
- Ordaining married men to be priests
- Ordination of women
- Outreach to all the baptised
- Outreach to the wider community
- Outreach to youth
- Overseas priests
- Parish pastoral council
- Parishes involved in planning for the future
- Provide more youth facilities in parishes
- Putting Gospel values in action
- Radical change, a new order, inverted pyramid
- Restore the Third Rite of Reconciliation
- Servant leadership
- Share the faith with others
- Special care of rural parishes
- Stronger parish communities
- Support same-sex marriage
- Transparency in governance and decision making
- Use social media to engage people
- Welcome back priests who have left to marry
- Women deacons
- Work together in unity
- Youth to be involved more in Church community

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

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

“To build a compassionate, welcoming, inclusive and courageous community where we come together to better understand Gospel values, how to live them and put them into practice — strengthened by ritual prayer so as to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit”.

“To reintroduce and promote the Third Rite of Reconciliation so as to encourage more parishioners to participate in the sacrament, as neither the First or Second Rites are attracting many parishioners.”

“God is asking us as a whole ‘Come back to me with all your hearts’.

There is not enough passion and commitment in us Catholics following the teachings given to us in the Bible by Jesus (and even the prophets in the Old Testament) and God wants to invite all of us young and old back into relationship with Him to know Him as He truly is, to love Him with heart, soul and mind, and to serve (to give without counting the cost) only Him”.

“God is calling the teachers in schools and the laity to be better educated in the faith to then be able to pass on the faith to children. The laity need to be taught how to encourage children and lapsed Catholics to practise their faith”.

“Women need to be equal and their presence in all Church governance needs to be equal to the male presence.

Women shouldn’t only be able to be acolytes but also deacons and, yes, priests. There’s a whole hurting humanity because some people don’t want to go to a male priest for reconciliation. We are all Christ bearers”.

“I have been a teacher for nearly 30 years in the same Catholic Secondary College ... I have personally suffered much persecution for my Catholic/Christian beliefs at school. There have been and are teachers who openly criticize students who have a faith and practice it, live it out, speak up about social issues that plague Australian society. It seems it is okay to have a social/moral stand on poverty, homelessness and other social issues affecting Australia but you cannot speak up about sex before marriage, homosexuality etc. ... Teachers like myself are few in number and many keep silent so as to not be found out for fear of reprisals”.

“To be compassionate to the marginalised. To be outspoken about injustice in all its forms.

To be inclusive to all, irrespective of sexual disposition or marital status.

To modernise with the times”.

“While lay involvement is getting better and the Church does listen, I would love to see a Church that involves the laity more [and] gives more of a scope for the laity to participate in the management of the Church”.

“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”

(ACTS 4:32-33)

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What questions do you have about the future of Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

“Our parish clergy are overworked, stressed and stretched beyond reasonable limits. Moving beyond strategies of parish amalgamation and closure, what other options will we explore? By that I mean the non-ordained’s role in making pastoral decisions?”

“How does the Church law allow for inclusion of all peoples? Do we need to adapt these laws to a changing world?”

“Why has the hierarchy failed to publicise the good works undertaken by our schools, hospitals, refugee support, etc?”

“How can a more synodal approach to leadership in the Church at parish and diocesan levels be exercised as a shared responsibility, by virtue of Baptism, between both lay and clergy?”

“How is the Church able to respond to the diversity of our community to be inclusive of all – Indigenous/First Nations, environmental protection, gay rights?”

“How can we better nourish and support the spiritual life of adult lay people? ”

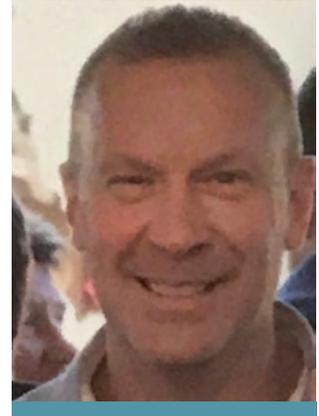
A SNAPSHOT OF

Your Stories of Faith

DENNIS

SYDNEY

I have found being part of a ministry quite rewarding. I currently hold [a] position ... [on a] parish pastoral council. The role can be time-consuming but very rewarding at the same time. For a long time, I was a parishioner who would attend Mass and that was it. My parish priest asked me to serve on the council and I am pleased to make my individual contribution to the parish. Further to that, I feel that I am serving God.



JENNI

PERTH

My husband's and my faith in the Catholic Church has been sorely tested since a new priest came to our parish. We tried to work with him in many ways and on many levels, but he was not open to growth or advice from others. We have come out of this experience with an even stronger connection to Jesus/God/ the Spirit and each other, but are very disappointed not only in the way this priest operated but how our concerns were handled by some members of the hierarchy.



JESSICA

MELBOURNE

From the ages 15 to 20, I attended a young adult faith formation group through my parish. It taught the Church's teaching on moral and ethical issues, it also covered explanations on the Mass. Guest speakers were invited and it was well attended. I am ever grateful for this formative opportunity, given to me through the generosity of young, faithful, passionate lay Catholics. This adult formation set me up for life; I still recall the basic principles I learnt 15 years ago on absolute truth, transubstantiation and ethics relating to abortions and euthanasia.





RELEASED REPORTS:

Missionary and Evangelising plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/missionary

UPCOMING REPORTS:

Prayerful and Eucharistic	JUNE 30, 2019
Humble, healing and merciful	JULY 7, 2019
A Joyful, hope-filled and servant community	JULY 14, 2019
Open to conversion, renewal and reform	JULY 21, 2019

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 Plenary Council

Let's Listen & Discern



To prepare for your small group discernment experience, as you consider the question: *How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is humble, healing and merciful*, your group will begin by praying with the Scriptures. Choose one of the Scripture readings below for your small group discernment experience.

Humble, healing and merciful

Matthew 9:9-13

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place.

Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."





Snapshot Report

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is

**HUMBLE, HEALING
AND MERCIFUL**



AS WE MOVE INTO THIS SECOND STAGE OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL JOURNEY, WE CONTINUE TO SEEK THE WISDOM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Beginning in July 2019, we are invited to reflect on Scripture, Church teaching and our contemporary situation in order to discern the answer to this question: How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is humble, healing and merciful? The fruits of what is discerned during this time will help shape the agenda of the first session of Plenary Council in October 2020.

This National Theme for Discernment is inspired by the voices of the People of God who expressed a deep and faith-filled trust in God and a need for lament and healing within the Church, acknowledging the sexual abuse crisis as a turning point for the Church in Australia. It identified the need for relationship and reconciliation among many within the Catholic community, and with the wider Australian society, particularly with Australia's First Peoples and with all of creation. A desire was expressed for stronger prayer and sacramental life and more effective outreach to those who seek healing, as a renewed openness to and sign of God's mercy.

TOPICS: WHAT DID PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?

People spoke about a number of different topics in **PHASE 1: LISTENING & DIALOGUE**. A comprehensive report on all the voices of participants will be released on **JULY 28, 2019**.

Below are some of the topics that informed this particular theme, which was created through a combination of analysis, discernment and prayer.

- Allow contraception, birth control
- Baby Boomer generation to listen to young Catholics
- Be a witness in society
- Better communication of what the Church does
- Better homilies
- Better implementation of Royal Commission recommendations
- Better training and support for youth leaders
- Call to repentance for clergy sexual abuse
- Care for neighbour
- Care for the environment
- Care for the family
- Defend right-to-life issues
- End clericalism
- End discrimination of LGBTQ
- Establish more youth programs
- Fight for human rights issues
- Focus on the new evangelisation
- Greater access to Mass and Reconciliation
- Greater concern for victims and survivors
- Greater connection with and inclusion of Indigenous Australians
- Greater emphasis on prayer and sacraments
 - Greater focus on Jesus Christ
 - Greater focus on the Word of God
 - Greater leadership from bishops
- Greater leadership from priests
- Greater recognition of Eastern Catholic Churches
- Greater trust, faith and hope in God
- Heal and move beyond the clergy sexual abuse scandal
- Healing liturgies and public signs or acts of reparation for clergy sexual abuse
- Inclusion of the divorced and remarried
- Listen to one another more
- Mass to be appealing to youth and children
- More transparency and accountability regarding clergy sexual abuse
- More welcoming parishes
- New translation of the Mass (inclusive language)
- Outreach to all the baptised
- Outreach to the wider community
- Outreach to youth
- Reduce margins between rich and poor
 - Restore the Third Rite of Reconciliation
 - Special care of rural parishes
 - Stronger parish communities
- Transparency in governance and decision making
- Youth to be involved more in Church community

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

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

“In Australia we still have a big divide between Indigenous brothers and the rest of us.

The Church needs to take a leading role in building reconciliation by adopting positive gestures that enhance and challenge this overdue reconciliation”.

“We’re living in the wake of the greatest possible disaster that could have descended upon the Church in this country—the sexual abuse crisis.

Firstly, I think God wants every possible effort to be directed towards offering assistance to victims of abuse in the Church.

Secondly, I think that God wants us as a Church collective to hang our head in shame”.

“Discern how to engage and bring to active faith those parents who send their children to Catholic schools but are not churchgoers.

Discern how to engage and bring to active faith the many people who attend Mass at Easter and Christmas or for Baptisms, but not otherwise”.

“Divorce is never wanted or planned for and, in some cases, necessary for the safety and wellbeing of the individuals involved.

The Church should not turn their backs on them as this denies their dignity and makes them less equal than their peers”.

“God is asking us to do something about the clericalism and subsequent abuse arising from this misuse of power. He is asking us to remember and come to know Jesus and to live as He did”.

“By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace”

(LUKE 1:78-79)

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What questions do you have about the future of Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

“How does the Church plan to address the issue of sex offenders within the Church and how will it support its victims?”

“Can we decrease authority in Church hierarchy and give some authority to the people?”

“How do we use Church resources for service to the poor?”

“How can we work to be more welcoming, inclusive, open, kind, loving, forgiving, compassionate, listening, and so build a ‘home/community’ Church for all, not just an institutional one?”

“How can we make the Church more inclusive of divorced and remarried, LGBTIQ, people with a disability, including the mentally ill, those who have been damaged by abuse in the Church—emotional, spiritual, physical and sexual abuse?”

A SNAPSHOT OF

Your Stories of Faith

GENNI

BUNBURY

As a small group we are cradle Catholics with a strong faith base and love of God, but a floundering confidence in the institution that is the present Catholic Church.

We want the Church to move forward to reflect a contemporary outreach while still upholding the high moral values with regards to abortion, euthanasia and the sanctity of marriage for example. We seek to see the Church open its eyes to the needs in the communities in which we live. For example, abolish the “clericalism” attitude of some clergy that causes division and lack of inclusiveness. Our personal experience has seen the Baptism of four babies by a paedophile priest while a former priest in a parish community is deemed unworthy of his priesthood (because he married), but he had been a major positive influence in the day-to-day care of the parish community.



BENJAMIN

ARMIDALE

To have the courage to let go the trappings of clericalism. To let go of elitism and exclusion. To embrace the downtrodden, the heart broken, the marginalised. For us to contemplate, how each of us may serve the Other? How may we tear down boundaries and take action to walk with others- to show mercy, to forgive, to love. To lead the way in bringing light to darkness- to take action in living-love in all things. To contemplate and act holistically- in our spiritual, social, political, environmental lives.



RUTH

SANDHURST

The sexual abuse scandal, the anti-gay marriage rhetoric, the patriarchal nature of governance and the attitude towards contraception has made it impossible for [my children] to remain active participants. All of my children are strong advocates for social justice and they applaud the Australian bishops for their stance on offshore detention and other issues such as climate change. However, the Church in Australia must engage with the other issues mentioned if it is to have a hope of retaining educated women within the ranks of its faithful. As a teacher in a Catholic school, I find the only way to recontextualise my faith so that it has relevance to my students is through social justice. I continually promote Caritas and all its wonderful work but I despair at times for the future of my parish and the Church in Australia as a whole.



Read more stories and snapshots at plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/voices-of-the-plenary-council/



RELEASED REPORTS:

Missionary and evangelising
Inclusive, participatory and synodal
Prayerful and Eucharistic

plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/missionary
plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/inclusive
plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/prayerful

UPCOMING REPORTS:

A joyful, hope-filled and servant community
Open to conversion, renewal and reform

JULY 14, 2019
JULY 21, 2019

Please note this report contains only a snapshot of thousands of stories and responses shared. A comprehensive report on the voices of participants will be released on July 28, 2019.

<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au>

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Let's Listen & Discern



To prepare for your small group discernment experience, as you consider the question: *How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is prayerful and Eucharistic*, your group will begin by praying with the Scriptures. Choose one of the Scripture readings below for your small group discernment experience.

Prayerful and Eucharistic

John 15:1-17

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

John 13:3-16

During supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them."

1 Corinthians 11:17-26

Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.



Snapshot Report

How is God calling us to be a
Christ-centred Church that is:

PRAYERFUL AND EUCHARISTIC



AS WE MOVE INTO THIS SECOND STAGE OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL JOURNEY, WE CONTINUE TO SEEK THE WISDOM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Beginning in July 2019, we are invited to reflect on Scripture, Church teaching and our contemporary situation in order to discern the answer to this question: How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is prayerful and Eucharistic? The fruits of what is discerned during this time will help shape the agenda of the first session of Plenary Council in October 2020.

This National Theme for Discernment is inspired by the voices of the People of God who shared how deeply they treasured the Eucharist and the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church. There was a call for stronger and more engaging preaching, with an emphasis on the Word of God and connection to daily life, some seeking a uniquely Australian expression of prayer and Eucharistic celebration, drawing from the wisdom and rituals of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and also bringing together the many migrant communities which make up the Church in Australia. There were many divergent expressions of ways in which people and communities encounter God through their experiences of prayer, music and liturgy, and a desire for catechesis, training and formation for those in ministries related to these.

TOPICS: WHAT DID PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?

People spoke about a number of different topics in **PHASE 1: LISTENING & DIALOGUE**. A comprehensive report on all the voices of participants will be released on **JULY 28, 2019**.

Below are some of the topics that informed this particular theme, which was created through a combination of analysis, discernment and prayer.

- Acknowledge Christ's presence in the Eucharist
- Affordable adult faith formation courses
- Authentic faith teaching in Catholic schools
- Better attention to all aspects of liturgy
- Better communication of what the Church does
- Better Faith formation
- Better formation for liturgical ministries and sacramental programs
- Better homilies
- Charismatic spirituality
- Church to act as a guide for Australian society
- Contemplative spirituality
- Cultural Masses
- Eucharistic adoration
- Greater attention to music in the liturgy
- Greater emphasis on prayer and Sacraments
- Greater focus on Jesus Christ
- Greater focus on the Word of God
- Greater involvement of the laity
- Greater leadership from Bishops
- Greater leadership from priests
- Greater support for RCIA
- Greater trust, faith and hope in God
- Importance of Communion services in rural parishes
- Keep the commandments
- Keep the faith
- Listen to the Holy Spirit
- Mass to be appealing to youth and children
- New translation of the Mass (inclusive language)
- Pray the Rosary
- Remain faithful to Church teaching
- Remain faithful to Church teaching on marriage
- Renewed call to holiness
- Return to Traditional Latin Mass
- Return to traditional pre-Vatican II ways

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

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

“Eucharistic Adoration: For Churches to offer daily Holy Hours or, where possible, perpetual Eucharistic Adoration to grow deeper in faith”.

“I think God is wanting us so-called Christians to get involved with learning more about our faith, to enable us to pass information onto the outside world; that is, hungry to know the truth. We can’t say we go to Mass and think that is all God expects of us”.

“God is asking us not to give up on Catholic schools.

I want Catholic education authorities to value the religious life of the Catholic school, not as a photo op or a 20-second sound bite, but as places that privilege the transmission of Catholic culture, where both tradition and contemporary life are valued”.

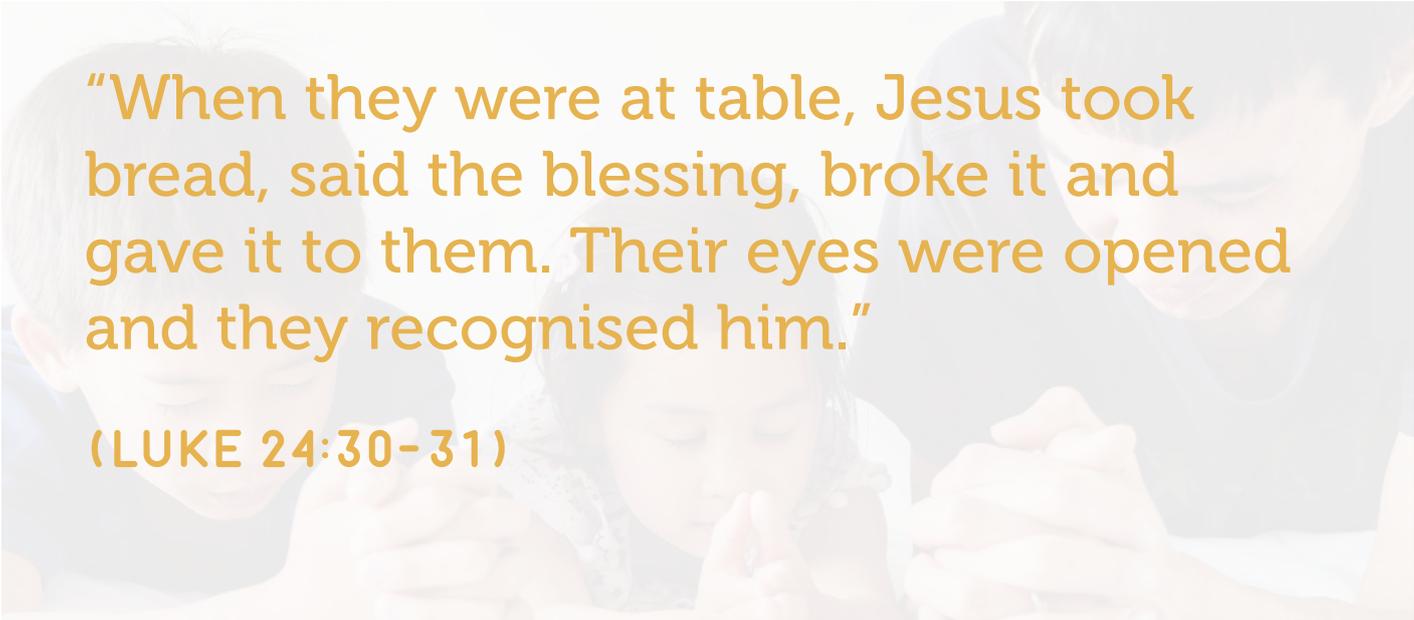
“Pray more. To be more reverent at Mass.

God wants us to obey God’s truth in the Bible, God wants us to obey the 10 Commandments. God wants us to say the Rosary. God wants us to love Him. God wants a personal relationship with Him”.

“Firstly to be patient. Many improvements/revivals in the Catholic Church over the centuries came from new movements inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, to listen. Much wrongdoing in our present society is very apparent if we revert to ‘first’ Christian principles.

Thirdly, we need to act: The Church and its members are too institutionalised and divorced from what is happening in our own neighbourhoods. We are not doing or acting like Christ would have done and in fact what Christ is still today wanting us to do. I think Pope Francis is making a definite leap in this direction”.



“When they were at table, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognised him.”

(LUKE 24:30-31)

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What questions do you have about the future of Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

“What does it mean to live a true Christian life?”

“How can we encourage all Catholics to be open to the Spirit working in people in different ways, through different forms of liturgy (traditional and charismatic), different types of worship and different faith responses to the Spirit in individuals and communities?”

“How do we get people to return to prayer when we live in such a fast-paced life?”

“Can lay-led liturgy be made to resemble the Mass more closely in regards to the prayers that are not part of lay-led liturgy but are part of the Mass?”

“How do all the faithful called to prayer and a living relationship with Jesus Christ learn about their faith through the Sacraments, catechesis, ongoing education and following the traditions of the Church in a multicultural society which has become very secular?”

A SNAPSHOT OF

Your Stories of Faith

ALAN

72 YEARS OLD. SYDNEY

As someone from a strong Catholic family, I had the benefit of a good Catholic upbringing and education. After school, I joined the local parish CYO where I met my future wife, who also had experienced a similar faith journey. Throughout our lives we have engaged in retreats, parish missions, family group activities and RCIA programs. These have helped to continue our faith experiences.



CELIA

58 YEARS OLD. MELBOURNE

At the daily Mass I attend, the priest will give a short three- to five-minute homily directly relevant to the Gospel and which aims to teach the faithful some key component of living Christian life and challenge us to live the faith better. The best homilies get to the point quickly and are not afraid of speaking clearly about the demands and rigour of living Catholic faith to the full.



ANONYMOUS

I came close to God through crisis. In many ways I feel like the prodigal son. When my wife was diagnosed with cancer at [in her 20s] my understanding of my faith was changed forever. Two years into her journey, I had completely turned my back on God – why would a loving God allow my wife to die and be in so much pain? Why would he let her get cancer at precisely the time we were planning to have children? Why would my life be completely disrupted to become her carer – losing my job and moving away from friends and family? I did not understand God, or where He was in my life at all. But I did witness my wife completely surrender her life to Him. She knew she was going to die and that God would take her to Heaven when He was ready for her. Three-and-a-half years after the diagnosis, He did exactly that. And I then realised that God was helping me the whole time – He was working through me to care for her, to be God for her and to love her. I sacrificed everything to care for her, but God gave me the physical, emotional and mental strength to carry [my wife] through her difficult earthly pilgrimage.

Read more stories and snapshots at plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/voices-of-the-plenary-council/



RELEASED REPORTS:

Missionary and evangelising
Inclusive, participatory and synodal

plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/missionary

plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/inclusive

UPCOMING REPORTS:

Humble, healing and merciful
A joyful, hope-filled and servant community
Open to conversion, renewal and reform

JULY 7, 2019

JULY 14, 2019

JULY 21, 2019

Please note this report contains only a snapshot of thousands of stories and responses shared. A comprehensive report on the voices of participants will be released on July 28, 2019.

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Plenary Council

Let's Listen & Discern



To prepare for your small group discernment experience, as you consider the question: *How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is a joyful, hope-filled and servant community*, your group will begin by praying with the Scriptures. Choose one of the Scripture readings below for your small group discernment experience.

A joyful, hope-filled and servant community

Luke 10:21-37

At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it."

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Matthew 6:25-34

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

Luke 4:16-30

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.



Snapshot Report

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is

A JOYFUL, HOPE-FILLED AND SERVANT COMMUNITY



AS WE MOVE INTO THIS SECOND STAGE OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL JOURNEY, WE CONTINUE TO SEEK THE WISDOM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Beginning in July 2019, we are invited to reflect on Scripture, Church teaching and our contemporary situation in order to discern the answer to this question: How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is a joyful, hope-filled and servant community? The fruits of what is discerned during this time will help shape the agenda of the first session of Plenary Council in October 2020.

This National Theme for Discernment is inspired by the voices of the People of God who expressed a yearning for the Church to be a sign of God's kingdom for all people in Australia – to be able to see the Catholic Church in action, and to recognise Jesus. There was an expression of faith-filled hope in the capacity of the Catholic community to celebrate together, to show what it is to be a follower of Christ and to be loved unconditionally by God. There was a call to contemplate the Gospel call to be a servant Church for the good of all people in Australia – particularly for refugees and asylum-seekers and other people who are vulnerable or at risk. Many responses called for greater sharing of the story of the good works done by so many people and organisations of the Church. Some responses expressed a hunger for strong witness of faith, especially by priests, young people and female leaders in parish and school ministries.

TOPICS: WHAT DID PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?

People spoke about a number of different topics in **PHASE 1: LISTENING & DIALOGUE**. A comprehensive report on all the voices of participants will be released on **JULY 28, 2019**.

Below are some of the topics that informed this particular theme, which was created through a combination of analysis, discernment and prayer.

- Acknowledge Christ's presence in the Eucharist • Authentic faith teaching in Catholic schools • Be a witness in society • Better attention to all aspects of liturgy • Better communication of what the Church does
- Better formation for liturgical ministries and sacramental programs • Better homilies • Better selection and formation of candidates to priesthood • Better use of finances • Care for neighbour • Charismatic spirituality • Church to act as a guide for Australian society • Contemplative spirituality • Creation of small communities/groups within parishes
- Cultural Masses • Defend right-to-life issues • End clericalism • Faith formation for parents • Greater access to Mass and Reconciliation • Greater attention to music in the liturgy • Greater connection with and inclusion of Indigenous Australians • Greater focus on Jesus Christ • Greater focus on permanent deacons • Greater focus on the Word of God
- Greater inclusion of all people • Greater leadership from priests • Greater trust, faith and hope in God • Hierarchy to listen to the Laity • Keep the faith • Laity supporting priests • Listen to one another more • Listen to the Holy Spirit • Mass to be appealing to youth and children • More welcoming parishes • Outreach to all the baptised
- Outreach to the wider community • Outreach to youth • Overseas priests • Parish pastoral council • Parishes involved in planning for the future • Pray the Rosary • Putting Gospel values in action • Renewed call to holiness • Share the faith with others • Stronger parish communities • Work together in unity • Youth to be involved more in Church community

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

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

“The Church in Australia is completely fragmented. Unify the approach for the future so that all priests and laity are ‘on the same page’.

At present, each diocese, and even each parish, follows its own rules, set by the bishop or, in some cases, the parish priest. The Church must come together in order to survive. Some parishes are very progressive in their thinking and practices, but others follow a very hard-line conservative approach”.

“Strengthen our practice as Christians through public worship and genuine assistance to the people seeking a loving relationship with Jesus. We need to reach people who are not inclined to attend established public worship”.

“To be not afraid in this time of the denial of God as God is always with us.

“To serve Him and others. Love always and grow in love with others. Pray more. Live out the Gospel values. Increased discussions on bigger issues, e.g. poverty, abortion. The ability to discuss our beliefs with everyone. Practise what we preach and believe. Celebrate the greater things in life. Be appreciative of the gifts God gave each of us. Include and accept all cultures within our community. Remember that God loves us unconditionally. Take care of our environment”.

To pray, pray, pray. Prayer is the oxygen of the soul and without it we cannot be close to God. Bishops, priests and religious nuns should constantly encourage the faithful to pray the Rosary and to frequently spend time in Adoration of the Holy Eucharist. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is much neglected in these times and the faithful should be constantly urged by bishops and priests to return to the practice of monthly Reconciliation”.

“To turn back to prayer in our daily lives.

To look for good in others, put them first, love our neighbour. We pray when we are in trouble, but must remember to thank God when our prayers are answered. Look after the elderly and sick in our parish.

To give back to them for their long service to our parish life. They may need someone to visit them and support them. This is a very worthwhile parish ministry to be encouraged.

To have some follow-up with parents who have attended the preparation classes for their children to receive the sacraments to encourage them to attend Sunday Mass in the future and join our parish life”.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Each day they met together in the Temple; they broke bread in their homes; they shared their food with great joy and sincerity of heart; they praised God and won the favour of all the people.”

(ACTS 2: 42-46)

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What questions do you have about the future of Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

“How do we engage people to be members of their parish community?”

“How do we offer hope to the Catholic people of Australia?”

“How can we better integrate our many foreign-born priests into the Australian Church?”

“Are we willing to return to the simplicity and fidelity required to reawaken a love of God’s truth in the world?”

“Can liturgy be more a means of expression of what is happening in a community—joy, grief, forgiveness, etc.—rather than a rigid adherence to ‘ritual’ which is not always relevant to a situation or life-giving?”

A SNAPSHOT OF

Your Stories of Faith

EUGENIA

BRISBANE

Some parishes are very welcoming as they know their community and are attentive to each other. In this way, they practise charity and more people will be willing to engage in their activities. [At one parish] the parish council is aware of greeting newcomers, they organise a monthly morning tea with the community and celebrate special occasions together.



JOHN

BRISBANE

We enjoyed the RCIA journey and were confirmed at the Easter Vigil. About 17 years later, I attended a Cursillo retreat and it also renewed my faith and helped me understand more about community. We are involved in a small Rosary group at the moment and the friendship and joy that has brought to me has been incredible. I am so glad that God brought me to the Church and that it was in the post-Vatican II era. The people really are the body of Christ along with all true believers.



PATRICK

MELBOURNE

I had a mother who had great faith which she received from her mother. Their faith was sustained by Mass and the family Rosary. They attended state schools as they lived in a remote area. Mum could argue intelligently with any trained theologian as she had received a deep understanding of her faith from her mother. I witnessed the power of prayer and how often it is answered even when you think that there is no hope – almost miraculous – definitely astounding and very impressive. Mum used to say the Rosary will sustain your faith. I gave up the daily Rosary eventually. I then realised that my life just wasn't working. I went back to it and I have noticed an enormous improvement in almost every area. I suspect the Rosary requires things like faith, hope, trust, humility, self sacrifice and contemplation on the core moments of Gospels.



Read more stories and snapshots at plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/voices-of-the-plenary-council/



RELEASED REPORTS:

Missionary and evangelising
Inclusive, participatory and synodal
Prayerful and Eucharistic
Humble, healing and merciful

plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/missionary
plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/inclusive
plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/prayerful
plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/humble

UPCOMING REPORTS:

Open to conversion, renewal and reform

JULY 21, 2019

Please note this report contains only a snapshot of thousands of stories and responses shared. A comprehensive report on the voices of participants will be released on July 28, 2019.

<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au>

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Let's Listen & Discern



To prepare for your small group discernment experience, as you consider the question: *How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is open to conversion, renewal and reform*, your group will begin by praying with the Scriptures. Choose one of the Scripture readings below for your small group discernment experience.

Open to conversion, renewal and reform

John 8:2-11

Early in the morning Jesus came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

1 Peter 2:1-10

Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:



Art by Ravina Waldren

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”
To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,
“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner,”
and
“A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall.”
They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.
But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that
you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous
light.
Once you were not a people,
but now you are God’s people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.

Matthew 11:25-30

“At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”



Snapshot Report

How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is

**O P E N T O
C O N V E R S I O N ,
R E N E W A L A N D R E F O R M**



AS WE MOVE INTO THIS SECOND STAGE OF THE PLENARY COUNCIL JOURNEY. WE CONTINUE TO SEEK THE WISDOM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Beginning in July 2019, we are invited to reflect on Scripture, Church teaching and our contemporary situation in order to discern the answer to this question: How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is open to conversion, renewal and reform? The fruits of what is discerned during this time will help shape the agenda of the first session of the Plenary Council in October 2020.

This National Theme for Discernment is inspired by the voices of the People of God who expressed a desire to do things differently in response to Christ and the experience of our people, accepting that faithfulness to tradition requires change that is both personal and communal. Respondents also affirmed the important role of the clergy, expressing their appreciation for their vocation and recognising the need for support and ongoing formation and accompaniment. Some asked for a consideration of alternative approaches to ordained ministry, some for a greater inclusion of laity and different groups in the Church's life, some for new models of governance and leadership, and some for a renewed fidelity to the Church's teachings. There was also a call for a renewed life of prayer and communion with one another, including understanding the many different ways in which we encounter God and experience a conversion of heart.

TOPICS: WHAT DID PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?

People spoke about a number of different topics in [PHASE 1: LISTENING & DIALOGUE](#). A comprehensive report on all the voices of participants will be released on [JULY 28, 2019](#).

Below are some of the topics that informed this particular theme, which was created through a combination of analysis, discernment and prayer.

- Better communication of what the Church does
- Better formation for liturgical ministries and sacramental programs
- Better implementation of Royal Commission recommendations
- Better Plenary Council process
- Better selection and formation of candidates to priesthood
- Better teachers in Catholic schools
- Better use of finances
- Charismatic spirituality
- Communion for all
- Concerns for diminishing parish communities
- Contemplative spirituality
- Creation of small communities/groups within parishes
- Diocesan Pastoral Council
- End celibacy, allow priests to be married
- End clericalism
- End discrimination of LGBTQ
- Fight for human rights issues
- Focus on the new evangelisation
- Greater focus on Jesus Christ
- Greater focus on permanent deacons
- Greater focus on the Word of God
- Greater inclusion of all people
- Greater involvement of the laity
- Greater leadership from bishops
- Greater leadership from priests
- Greater trust, faith and hope in God
- Heal and move beyond the clergy sexual abuse scandal
- Healing liturgies and public signs or acts of reparation for clergy sexual abuse
- Hierarchy to listen to the Laity
- Inclusion of the divorced and remarried
- Laity supporting priests
- Lay-led parishes
- Lay-led liturgies and Masses
- Listen to one another more
- Listen to the Holy Spirit
- Mass to be appealing to youth and children
- Modernise Church teachings
- New leadership and governance model
- New model of Church, diocese, parish
- New translation of the Mass (inclusive language)
- Ordaining married men to be priests
- Ordination of women
- Overseas priests
- Parish pastoral council
- Parishes involved in planning for the future
- Radical change, a new order, inverted pyramid
- Reduce margins between rich and poor
- Renewed call to holiness
- Restore the Third Rite of Reconciliation
- Servant leadership
- Support same-sex marriage
- Transparency in governance and decision-making
- Use social media to engage people
- Welcome back priests who have left to marry
- Women deacons

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

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

“Adopt a change of heart. Adopt a team approach and inclusivity within the Church. Adopt the Gospel values. All baptised have a role in the life and mission of the Church...”.

“As a community voice, the vision we have for an Australian Catholic Church is that it be a place for all Australian Catholics. At the moment, it is not. I would like to see our Church be more inclusive. We exclude the very people Jesus would have walked out of His way to help”.

“To form a cooperative structure of bishop, priests, religious and laity to lead and oversight the leadership and management of the Church. This could be done by a group of people working together as a pastoral council of the diocese or as a group of 6 or 8 on an elected ‘Board’; There would be an equal number of women and laity”.

“Leaders in the Church, especially bishops, priests and consecrated members, need to be courageous in sharing their faith without compromising on any of the more controversial topics as models for the rest of the members of the Church, especially those members who are disheartened or afraid to proclaim Christ’s teachings”.

“Bishops and priests are called upon more than ever to bear witness to the Gospel values of humility, service and solidarity with ordinary people, especially the poor - in fact and deed, not just in words. As Pope Paul VI once said, ‘The Church needs witnesses more than teachers’—now more than ever!”.

“Priests should have a choice as to whether they wish to marry and have families and serve God in a vocation they have been called to. This can also enable them to minister and support families who are in crises”.

“After John the Baptist had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee and began preaching the Good News of God. He said, ‘The time has come; the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the Good News.’”

(MARK 1:14-15)

A SNAPSHOT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

What questions do you have about the future of Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

“How do we empower our youth to take on more of a leadership role?”

“How can women be included into the governance of the Church at the highest levels?”

“How can a more synodal approach to leadership in the Church at parish and diocesan levels be exercised as a shared responsibility, by virtue of baptism, between both lay and clergy?”

“Our parish clergy are overworked, stressed and stretched beyond reasonable limits. Moving beyond strategies of parish amalgamation and closure, what other options will we explore—and by that I mean, the non-ordained role in making pastoral decisions?”

“Will you review the annulment process so it is more understanding of real life circumstances and not punish someone whose marriage has ended— particularly if it has ended due to abuse and deception?”

“Are you willing to put aside traditions (‘this is the the way we have always done things’) and dedicate yourselves to prayer to hear from and listen to the quiet, still leading of the Holy Spirit—what God has for the next chapter of the Catholic Church is Australia? ”

“How will sacraments be administered with declining numbers of clergy?”

“How do we provide much better support for priests new to their role as leaders; priests in a new country; priests new to a diocese or different place?”

A SNAPSHOT OF

Your Stories of Faith

PAULINE

PERTH

We had a wonderful parish priest. His humility, willingness to serve, selflessness and compassion changed my life at a time when I was considering looking for an alternative parish or maybe even denomination. He made every person in our large parish feel important to God. Because of the way he radiates the love of Christ, people wanted to be involved. He taught me that humility, gentleness, patience and love are the key to closeness to Jesus. Priests who are part of the parish community, not set apart from the community, make such a difference.



PENELOPE

BROKEN BAY

As a married couple with young children, [our local parish] formed my ideal of parish: a warm community with many people participating eagerly in parish activities. So what was the secret of this parish? I suggest it was a priest who listened to his people, discerned their needs and acted on what he heard; who was warm, democratic and inclusive. As a result, the parishioners responded with wholehearted participation and helped each other both in their spiritual lives and in their very active family lives. Perhaps it was a function of the time and the place, and perhaps now it would not be possible to work in exactly that way, but I need to believe that my experience of vibrant and nourishing parish life is still possible in Australia.



ANONYMOUS

MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE

One of our group has a gay brother who stopped going to his local parish community as he felt unwelcomed by the wider Church. He wanted to be an active, practising Catholic who could receive Communion, but felt outcast under existing Church rules. It also put a great strain on his relationship with his practising sister as she was in terrible conflict between her love for her brother and her loyalty to obeying the Church rules. This conflict also extended to their wider family. In the end, he stayed away from church as a way of minimising the family conflict. The sister is realising that Jesus always loved and never judged the marginalised people he came into contact with and that people must always be put ahead of rules in a truly merciful Church. Surely, as a Church, we must be doing the same and welcoming the brother fully into our community.

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Humble, healing and merciful	plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/humble
Joyful, hope-filled servant community	plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/servant

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*Mary MacKillop embodied all that is best
in your nation and in its people:
justice to those unfairly treated,
perseverance in the face of adversity,
genuine openness to others,
hospitality to strangers,
generosity to the needy,
kindness and
support to the suffering.*

(Pope John Paul II, Sydney, 1995)



As we prepare for the Plenary Council 2020, we pray
that Mary MacKillop will inspire our Australian Church
to be as Christ-centred as we are called to be.