



St Joseph's Parish Malvern held two Listening and Dialogue sessions on the 30th October and 1st December 2018 in preparation for the Catholic Church's Plenary Council 2020.

Each session saw participants break into groups of 4-5 people. Each group's facilitator invited the participants to reflect on the question *"What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?"* Participants then shared their responses before agreeing on a general topic of conversation. Participants then reflected on this topic and were invited to share stories based on their experience of this topic. Finally, participants were asked to list what questions they had about the future of the Church in Australia which they would like the Plenary Council to consider.

The following pages provide a summary of each group's comments. Thank you to the facilitators of each group, who have lodged their group's submissions to the Plenary Council online.

You too can still have a say in shaping the agenda of the Plenary Council, as you have until Wednesday 6th March 2019 to lodge a submission online.

Your voice is important in shaping the future of the Church. To lodge a submission on the Plenary Council webpage visit: <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say/>, scroll down to the link "Have your say" and then follow the prompts.

Each response is received directly by the Plenary Council team and will help shape the program for the Plenary Council, scheduled for October 2020.

The three questions for your submission are:

1. What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?
2. What questions do you have about the future of the Church for the Plenary Council to consider in 2020?
3. Please share a story of your experiences of your faith or the Church to give context to your responses to Q1 and Q2.

Plenary Council 2020
Listening and Dialogue Session One
St Joseph's Parish Malvern October 30, 2018

GROUP ONE

Summary of Outcomes

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

- To welcome and support asylum seekers, the marginalized, the poor.
- To discern ways to reach out to and include young people.
- To redress the wrongs that have been committed in a spirit of love and generosity
- To make a major revision of the training program for priests so that they can better connect with the people and understand their varied situations.
- To make more roles for women in the church eg., women as deacons.
- To make our celebration of the Eucharist a time of joy, prayer and praise.
- To provide more opportunities for authentic adult spiritual formation, as per the traditional teaching of canonized saints

The first point and the broad topic of social justice were the most frequently made points.

Our stories of our experiences of faith and the Church

- Effective communication is vital and needs to improve in the Church today.
- The Church has ceased to be relevant to a growing number of people.
- It was clear that people can lead good spirit filled lives and not go to Church.

What questions do you have about the future of the church in Australia for the Plenary Council to consider?

- Consider allowing priests to marry.
- How can you ensure that Christ is at the centre of all your discussions.
- How can you improve the education of all priests and make it relevant to 21st century life in Australia.
- How do we make discernment a central part of our faith experience.
- What are you doing to address the decline in vocations to the priesthood.

GROUP TWO

Summary of Outcomes

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

To take up our role of being a leaven in our society; to find anew the message of Jesus, so that we can live it out in our world.

Our stories of our experiences of faith and the Church

The group had various stories about growing up Catholic - some experienced different paths being taken by siblings; others had experience of multicultural aspects of Church, which highlighted the universality of the Church; one had grown up in two faiths(both Christian); all saw a relationship with Jesus/Spirit/ God as being central.

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

- How to better engage younger generations in the life of the Church?
- How to "clean up" the mess that we have allowed to happen, over some time.
- How to share the gifts of the community in our worship times: specifically, sharing the delivering of homilies?
- How can the Church take on the voice of Jesus by greater overt engagement with social and political issues?
- How can women be seen and heard in Church governance and leadership?
- How can we bring back collegiality into the Church's life?

GROUP THREE

Summary of Outcomes

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

To become more contemporary- in community building, social justice, interfaith openness, increased youth involvement, liturgy and clergy

- To reflect humanity and compassion as a faith group towards vulnerable groups, other ethnicities, refugees, women in general, etc
- Our faith culture should be an expression of what Christ portrayed
- Incorporate women just as Jesus did in the Gospels
- Church modernisation – reinvent itself post abuse
- Increased participation and profile of women in the Church
- Priests to be given option to marry and remain in clergy
- Divorcees not to be ostracised
- Advocacy, encouragement and mandate to speak up when there is injustice
- Priests and lay people to run the Church together rather than just priest
- Priests to listen to and be open and accepting of lay people
- Focus of our Church to be Mission rather than maintenance
- Regular open discussion with and support from clergy
- Reconciliation and acts of Penance for abuse
- Demonstrate safe environment post abuse

Our stories of our experiences of faith and the Church

- Positive experience with community putting forward social justice support
- Negative experience of divorcees who cannot receive Holy Communion
- Stigma
- Negative overriding feelings or imposition of guilt
- Women not being in positions like clergy
- Difficulty marrying non Catholic people
- Culture change to draw on inclusion
- Catholic Sisters being first to educate Aboriginal children, especially girls
- Big stigma of sin
- Clergy imposition on Church community decisions
- Structure of Church- not collaborative
- Homilies, some people more gifted
- Catholic school curriculum seeing changes such as openness and learning of other faiths
- Mass wording 'boring'- needs relevancy
- Previous involvement in Church liturgy heavy at times
- Lack of young people engagement-need to reach out and make more relevant- not enough go to mass, attendance poor

What questions do you have about the future of the church in Australia for the Plenary Council to consider?

- Why are schools not involved?
- How are the youth being reached when they do not attend mass?
- How can religious curriculum incorporate contemporary topics and scholarship?

Dot points from other topics emerging: What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

- Church to have a governance which reflects acceptance to people of other faith traditions or of no particular religious group or spirituality
- Church open and transparent in its deliberations
- Community building more than showing up for mass
- Compassion, hope and outreach -service to young people and the elderly
- Non hierarchical structure, more humility
- Stronger sense of relationship
- Parishes to have a 'heart'
- Look out for the vulnerable within and without the Church
- Inclusive parishes
- Conversations about God's Word
- Bible studies in Church
- Youth relevancy
- Contemplative prayer groups
- More Exposition and prayer

GROUP FOUR

Summary of Outcomes

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

“Continuing to give Christian witness as Catholics in Australia”

Stories of faith and church based on topic chosen above

- Witness such as refugee support ministry in St J’s that builds on earlier work in other parishes (Deepdene etc.), and now extends to others on the margins of Catholic belief eg. non-practicing etc, while bringing in people from neighbouring parishes like St Roch’s – building community around the ministry
- How does faith and witness look to others? Is it confined to ‘church’? How do we look with fresh eyes to the example that others give ‘outside the church’?
- Witness of early educators esp. nuns, and the parents who promoted, at great expense (time and ££), the value of Catholic education for their children
- Need for us to bring people towards a deeper understanding of who Jesus really is and why/how his life leads us to faith in God

What questions do you have about the future of the church in Australia for the Plenary Council to consider?

- How to make sure that the Church is identified with people on the margins, not primarily with people of power and wealth
- How to change the image of the Church to one that welcomes the outsiders, those who don’t conform to Church rules eg. same-sex couples, divorced etc.
- How to reach out to ‘lapsed’ Catholics and show the Church accepts them

GROUP FIVE

Summary of Outcomes

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

Group Topic

To be a church of real engagement and commitment through increased ongoing formation of priests and laity - our response to the Spirit

➤ **Social Justice**

As a missionary church of the poor, be a civic voice to assist asylum seekers, refugees, the vulnerable and homeless

➤ **Inclusivity**

Church should take off the mantle of power, listen seriously to the church (laity) and accept women fully in the life of church.
Operate as one 'family' without sexism or age barriers

➤ **Outward looking, active church**

Be more accepting of those not of "us"; engage with community to facilitate the leadership of Pope Francis.

➤ **Governance**

Ensure structures are consistent across parishes by seriously involving laity and offering formation throughout the lives of parishioners

GROUP SIX

Summary of Outcomes

Topic - Inclusiveness

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

Listen with the heart of Jesus, and respond with his voice

1. Review relevance of some doctrines to 21st century society

- Role of women
- Contraception, especially for at risk people
- Divorce
- Marriage Annulment
- Confession
- Sacramental participation - inter-denomination

2. Recognise people's desire for God and full participation in the church

- Divorcees
- LBGTQI community

Remove obstacles to maintaining connection

1. Authoritarian approach

- Theory based responses as opposed to lived experiences
- Man made decisions
- Lack of compassion
- Contradictory morale compass

2. Ultra conservatism of new seminary priests

3. Commercialisation of tithing

4. Reduction in number of Catholic schools

What questions do you have about the future of the church in Australia for the Plenary Council to consider?

1. What proportion of laity will be involved in the review, recommendation and decision making processes?
2. How will the council ensure objectivity and transparency if bishop centric?
3. What is the church doing to regain the trust of the Catholic and the broader communities?
4. How open are bishops to the prospect of change?
5. How will the church approach and manage change within the clergy and parish communities?

GROUP SEVEN

Summary of Outcomes

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

Our group consisted of three St Joseph parishioners and one parishioner from each of St Mary's and St Anthony's.

The pool of points that resulted from our brain storming activity centred round two general areas:

- (i) The failure of Catholic schools to produce young Catholics who had a thorough knowledge of our faith, had a personal relationship with Jesus, had a sense of sin, received the sacraments regularly and prayed according to traditional Catholic devotions.
- (ii) The need for our church to be truly "catholic" –open to all, a church focused on service not power, a church in which lay men and women have a voice.

We decided to combine these two general areas and take as our topic:

Leading our young people into faith and the Church.

This led to a frank and open discussion that involved all the group in sharing and listening.

Some of the main points people made were:

- In the past the religious teaching given in Catholic schools (and parishes) was often based on fear, punishment and hell fire and not on the love and mercy of God.
- Catholic schools (and the Church) in the past tended to be separated and protected but today young people are exposed to so much negative publicity about the Catholic Church in the media.
- Young people in Catholic schools are often inspired by the opportunities for forms of social service and justice that they are given.
- Some parents are worried that children in Catholic schools don't have an experience of prayer and the supernatural.
- One suggestion as a way of getting young people involved in parish life and eventually participating in parish Sunday Mass was to hold "Praise and Worship" gatherings on Sunday evening in which young people could have some input into the songs, readings and activities.

One gospel image that relates to this topic of leading young people into faith and the Church is the parable of the yeast in the dough:

"What shall I compare the Kingdom of God with? It is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through." (Luke 13: 20-21)

If we are to spread the good news of the Gospel, we need to be involved with the world in which we live

Plenary Council 2020
Listening and Dialogue Session Two
St Joseph's Parish Malvern December 1, 2018

GROUP ONE

Summary of Outcomes

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

- Renewal of community
- Find ways to be more relevant in the lives of young families
- Improve communication especially for those people not online, including education of the lay community and opportunities for personal renewal
- That the Church respond to current challenges – the marriage Act, Euthanasia, Abortion, Clerical Abuse
- That the Church explain the mess the Church is in, with honesty and humility.
- Make the education of priests more relevant to life in the community, address the high handed attitude of some priests
make celibacy optional
encourage prospective priests to have some life experience before going to the seminary

The most frequent responses were around the need to be more inclusive as follows

- To welcome the stranger and the outsider
- To be more Christ like in our acceptance of others
- To be more compassionate
- To reach out to asylum seekers and refugees

What questions do you have about the future of the church in Australia for the Plenary Council to consider?

- How do we become more inclusive as a community?
- Will/can the church explain the mess it is in?
- Can the church tell us what is doing to ensure that the abuse of children and vulnerable people will never happen again?
- Will the church arrange for more and better education for the parish communities so that people understand changes in the teaching of the Church in response to a changing world?

GROUP TWO

Summary of Outcomes

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

To connect and engage with all Australians through Catholic Media and through "Catholic Social" eg Facebook, Twitter etc.

What questions do you have about the future of the church in Australia for the Plenary Council to consider?

- Why has the hierarchy failed to publicise the good works undertaken by our schools, hospitals, refugee support etc? Sell the positivity.
- We should regain the focus on right/wrong (sin) in our church life through prayer.
- Despite the sorrowing recent issues affecting the church in Australia, we do not see education/training to rid the church of clericalism. When can we expect action?
- In light of the success of WYD, why are we not aiming a similar tactic aimed at the mid-years, say, 35-50?
- When will the hierarchy address the under-utilization of assets in Victoria?
- As requested by Pope Francis, the church should be governed by a dynamic, charismatic, humble and honest hierarchy. When can expect to see this happen?
- In light of the drastic fall in numbers of ordained personnel, when can expect inclusive dialogue about a future that includes married male clergy and? Laughable that one has to become a married Anglican to join our church as a married priest.

GROUP THREE

Summary of Outcomes

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

The main themes that we discussed were the role (or lack of role) of women in the Church today and Clericalism (including the training and education of priests and their inability to deal with family issues in a modern society).

We also discussed the inappropriateness of liturgy and theology promoted in the Church today as being out of step with a changing world.

And finally, we were critical of the lack of lay involvement in the Plenary Council process and were sceptical that our comments and recommendations will be heard.

What questions do you have about the future of the church in Australia for the Plenary Council to consider?

- We consider that if the Church does not act urgently to change it will have no future in Australia. (Change means acknowledging past problems and mistakes and committing to examine and introduce reforms in all aspects of the Australian Catholic Church.)
- We ask that the Plenary Council re-considers the role of women in the life of the Church and recognises the equality of all people in the eyes of God. (This includes acknowledging and promoting the role of women across all walks of a modern society; especially in the life of the Church.)
- We believe that 'clericalism' is responsible for many of the current ills of the Church and reform of the Clergy is urgently needed. (This includes reviewing who of the faithful may be ordained; how they are trained and mentored, whether they can be married, whether priesthood is permanent or temporary commitment.)
- We are concerned about the composition of the Plenary Council and fear that nothing will change! (Particularly that members of the laity will be included by invitation and that there is no guarantee the issues most highlighted by the Listening & Dialogue sessions will be included?) (e.g. the role of women in the Church)

GROUP FOUR

Summary of Outcomes

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

After the period of reflection we gathered the thoughts and grouped them deciding that the umbrella most of them could be placed under was “Inclusiveness”

Our stories of our experiences of faith and the Church raised the following:

- We discussed that the Church needs to be open to all and ensure no one is left behind.
- We reflected on the way Jesus sought out the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised when he walked the earth.
- We believe that the Church needs to play a far greater role in representing and supporting these people in today’s society. So many of the Church’s laws prevent the people at the fringe of today’s society from feeling welcomed or belonging to the Church

Other areas discussed included:

- Church Structure, need for less hierarchy
- Greater transparency and accountability
- Language of the Liturgy
- Laws relating to sex
- Climate change, care for the environment
- Engagement of youth - social justice is seen as an opportunity to encourage young people to be involved and do the work Jesus asks us to do.

What questions do you have about the future of the church in Australia for the Plenary Council to consider?

- What is the church going to do to ensure all marginalised groups feel included
- What is the Church going to do to include more women in its decision making processes
- Is the Church going to address its laws to maintain relevance in a more contemporary society

GROUP FIVE

Summary of Outcomes

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

Our group presented a number of responses including the following:

- Looking at justice issues in light of the Gospel and responding
- Church governance: reduction in number of priests and is amalgamating parishes the answer
- Dwindling attendance at mass: how do we nurture faith in people in a way that they make a connection between faith in God and participation in a faith community?
- Encourage further involvement of laity in parish life
- Hear the voice of God in a range of ways
- Continue to engage women in church ministry
- Welcome the stranger
- Listen to God's voice: how do we foster people's relationship with God especially in an increasingly busy world?
- Care for the poor - not just financially poor, but poor in mind, spirit or companionship
- God is urgently calling us to be more engaged in the issues of our world today, especially issues of inequality and poverty
- Our Christian lives have something to bring to our engagement with issues of earth and its deterioration by humanity, as well as issues of respect and care for one another versus war and lack of peace
- Don't be afraid to speak boldly on issues that matter

This led us to the key topic to reflect on, namely **"How do we as people of God engage in our world and its key issues?"**

Our stories of our experiences of faith and the Church raised the following:

- Importance of walking the walk.
- Working within community structures; we can't engage with issues as an individual, but need to work through and with existing policies and structures.
- This means we need to connect with other churches and organisations
- Story of personal involvement with an organization called Sydney Alliance, which is a group of both church and unchurched. One of the key issues this organization focused on was "affordable housing". The Alliance worked with Local, State and Federal governments to address this issue. Another issue was "climate change".
- The church has enormous spiritual wealth to make the world a better place, yet there seems to be a disconnect between people going to church to worship and then living separate lives outside of going to mass
- What processes do we have in place already within our parishes to encourage people not just to worship but to be involved with people's needs?
- To give life to the full (Matthew's Gospel)

- In the past Catholics were punished for marrying non-Catholics. For example, such couples had to get married in a box room off the side of the church or in a registry office. Fortunately the church has progressed since then.
- We want a church where people come out of mass smiling, not laden with guilt.
- Can easily get overwhelmed at the mess of the world, climate and humanity.
- The spirit moves through people even in their suffering. Eg. Becoming a widow(er), a refugee or a parent of a difficult child.

What questions do you have about the future of the church in Australia for the Plenary Council to consider?

- How do we link people's experience of church through Catholic schools and Catholic parishes?
- How do people translate their "knowledge" of faith through schools and knowledge of social justice issues to a "heart" experience?
- How do we assist people to engage in worship in a way that leads them to want to go out and live their worship in their lives?
- How is the church going to take up its responsibility to critique our government's policies?

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If you wish to run your own Listening and Dialogue session with your family, a group of friends or perhaps a group of people from an organisation you’re a part of, feel free to download a “Listening and Dialogue Encounter” guide from:
<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say/>

