

OUR LADY of the PINES PARISH, DONVALE, MELBOURNE

PLENARY COUNCIL SUBMISSION

This Plenary Council Submission is based on four Listening and Dialogue Sessions held at Our Lady of the Pines Parish, Donvale, Melbourne on Monday 12 November and Tuesday 13 November 2018 at 9.15 am and 7.30 pm.

All of the participants were active Catholics, who attend Mass every Sunday, who are active members of a vibrant Catholic community and many are actively involved in Catholic social services agencies.

Consideration was given to preparing an executive summary or collating common themes to reduce the level of duplication. However, it is valuable for the Plenary Council Facilitation Team to see the common themes that have emerged from the various Listening and Dialogue Sessions.

The sessions began with a quiet reflection. The participants were advised that their personal thoughts were critical and each person's views are valid, even if they differ from the other participants. The sessions were seen as an opportunity to share ideas and experiences. For some people, this brought up some painful experiences, which were treated with care, respect and Christ-like love. The discussions traversed the experiences of all the participants, including their hopes and aspirations for our church and what is typical of the broader Catholic communities around Australia. It was recognised that our parish is blessed to have a Christ-like parish priest and community.

The process focused on the key questions that the bishops of Australia have asked us to address. There was some level of overlap between the responses to the first and the second question posed by the bishops.

WHAT DO YOU THINK GOD IS ASKING OF US IN AUSTRALIA AT THIS TIME?

The first question was seen as a little abstract by some of the participants and - *What do we want our church to look like in 2025? or What would Jesus want His church to look like in 2025?* – were discussed. None of the participants sought change in the Church because it would be convenient to them, but recognised the presence of the Holy Spirit in the process.

The responses by the participants to the first question of - *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?* - were as follows:

To be a more encompassing church. To get back to how Jesus was on earth and welcome everyone. Don't be so judgemental. Too many man made laws. Be more welcoming. If people want to become Catholic, don't put laws in the way – Jesus would have wanted them to be baptised.

To be more inclusive. What would Jesus do?

To be more tolerant, open and welcoming.

'What would Jesus do?' He would reach out to those who are often made 'outcasts' by the many rules we now have.

To be authentically representative of the truth of the teachings of Jesus. That will genuinely show His encompassing love for all people of the world without exception.

To be loving. Respectful of differences. To be tolerant. To be accepting and forgiving. To be more Christ-like. Less focused on man-made rules. Less ostentation eg dress of the bishops and the hierarchy. To be open and appealing to our youth – open to all in fact. To be less staid and conservative. To be joyful and provide services. Welcoming. Rejuvenation and rebirth. To be open to the Holy Spirit. To promote our Catholic bodies like Caritas and Vinnies.

Less institutional. Less emphasis on rules and regulations, and on punishment for not following them. Welcoming. Inclusive. Non-judgemental. Put others first. More concerned about how we treat each other than following rules. Uplifting liturgies – language we can all relate to. Not lose our traditions but move with the times. How do we attract people back? People feel disconnected. More lay people helpers - priests don't have time to visit their community. Greater role for women in leading.

That we recognise that the Catholic Church, the institution and the faith, is dying as an institution – by most criteria is irrelevant to society. That God's church model the teachings of Jesus, that the Church truly reflect the Faith. That the people of the church accept responsibility for the mission of the Church. That all Catholics model the teachings of Jesus in responding to the challenges of society. That lay people insist on a Christ-like church and demand accountability from church leaders. That women be treated equally in the Church. That bishops listen to all the people of God. That the Church provide Christ inspired leadership on social issues. That the bishops of the Church listen carefully to what Jesus said to the Pharisees.

More participation and attendance in Church mass and events.

More relevance to current times, be more progressive.

Get the younger generations to participate.

More bible study of the old and new testament to get a better understanding of the bible and God / Jesus' teachings.

Acceptance of all – eg divorcees, people in same-sex relationships – a non-judgmental church.

Make mass more welcoming – less pompous and ceremonial.

To make the church more palatable for young people.

Cancel individual Confessions.

Excommunicate priests, bishops etc who have been convicted of paedophilia.

Married priests.

Female priests.

To be relevant to our community (all people).

To engage deeper with young people under 30 and young families – ie Priests to become missionaries in their community / parish.

Less emphasis on sin and more forgiveness – ie Divorce.

Less Ritual. Less Rules.

Women priests.

Celibacy out – not compulsory. Reduction in Clericalism.

Reintroduce Reconciliation of the 3rd Rite.

Greater role for women – ie Deacons.

Remove the Bishops' mitre.

Weddings outside church buildings.

Women ordained to the priesthood – Having been involved in the ecumenical movement, I believe it works very well in other churches.

The church needs to be more inclusive of all people. Judgements should not be made on people.

The Church has got to become more relevant.

Priests should be allowed to marry.
Confession should not be compulsory.

Parish priests should have contact with children at school – regularly – If only addressing a school assembly and having fun and positive time there.

Parishioners to be taught from the Bible and to openly discuss.

A place of acceptance and trust.

Reaching out to all, and not judging.

A Church that openly practices what it preaches, and provides help and refuge.

Increasing role for women – Not only cleaning, flowers, office work ext, but teaching, ministerial roles, on committees, and right throughout the church.

Developing paid roles / positions for either males or females, to support priests in a ministry role (eg Uniting Church).

Acceptance of LGBTI – These are all normal human beings whose needs are the same as ours. They require understanding and acceptance. We need to change our attitudes to stop the needless persecution of these people. We need to halt discrimination in our workplaces, schools and churches. We need to develop an acceptance of diversity. We need to provide acceptance for both students and teachers, and reduce the burden they carry. Provide councillors where needed.

That the church continues to be relevant to all ages.

That it embraces all people with love, understanding and compassion.

That it is inclusive so that no groups feel unwelcome despite belonging to a minority group within society.

That the sacraments that have always been an integral part of the church have all remained and are regularly observed.

That the rigidity of some of the rules have been studied and in some cases changed to address in a sympathetic way the needs of its members.

That despite the challenges presented by the non-believers our faith in God remains steadfast.

God is asking us to be more like Jesus: humble, accepting of all, loving, observant, forgiving, welcoming, warm, comforting, non-judgemental, empathetic, not feeling superior to anyone else.

He wants us to love Him and to show this by loving one another.

WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA THAT YOU WOULD LIKE THE PLENARY COUNCIL TO CONSIDER?

Moving then to the second question posed by the bishops – *What questions do you have about the future of the church in Australia that you would like the plenary council to consider?* – it was clear from all the participants that considerable change is necessary in our Church to take us from where we are today to what God is asking of us in Australia at this time.

The practical steps to implement the necessary changes were seen as follows:

Women must be empowered in the Church.

The laity generally must be included in decision-making.

New structures advising the bishops.

Bishops reporting on goals – successes and failures.

The selection of bishops must be informed by the laity.

Parish priests must reject autocratic approaches.

Pastoral Councils at dioceses and parish levels.

Transparency in church affairs.
Strategic plans for all levels of Church administration.
Return of the Third Rite of Reconciliation.
Community reflections.

We need to be more evangelical. Look at what the Pentecostal churches do – they have large numbers.

I am not sure how, but we need to get the young ones staying with the church and attending Mass. We should be asking the young generation the question of why they have drifted away and what we can do to get them to participate again – not just teenagers, but people in their 30s and 40s. Perhaps we need to ‘market’ ourselves better – for instance the Salvation Army is always in the paper when there are disasters. Catholic agencies do a great job too but they are not talked about eg Caritas v Red Cross.

Encourage more married deacons – preferably married priests.
Include women in the hierarchy of the church so they can participate in decision making.
More lay participation may help as we have so many foreign born priests now and they may not relate to the young people being from a different culture. Not quite sure what the ‘lay look’ should be at this stage but they need to be encouraged to help build up the numbers coming to Mass and participate in the sacraments.
Jesus wasn’t on a pedestal – the priests need to be more of the people – take away the administrative tasks from priests and the financial responsibilities – they should only be doing pastoral work.

Find a way to bring more people to weekend mass because, unless they study God’s word at home, this is the only way to know Jesus’ message – the Good News.
Women in the church have a great deal to offer and I would like to see them more prominent, not necessarily ordained.
Why can’t we have married priests?
Reach out to young people with a positive message about the teachings of Jesus.

The hierarchy (princes) of the church have to be more in touch with the people, both mature and young.
Married priests would have a more realistic idea of everyday life and its difficulties, as would women priests.
I have great hopes in the leadership of Pope Francis. He is a humble man who does seem to be ‘more like Jesus’.

By removing from the hierarchy of the church all that is not of Jesus teachings, including all resistance to reaching out to all people who are struggling with conventional Catholic teachings and canon law, focusing strictly on pastoral care.

Abolish compulsory celibacy.
Combine all Christian churches.
Married priests.
Female bishops and priests.
Less hierarchical decisions and instructions.
Eliminate many man-made rules.
Go back to basics – Love your God and Love your Neighbour.
Appeal to our youth – less boring services.
Promote our wonderful good works.
Listen to the lay people.

Open the church up – transparency.
Change the way we choose our Pope and our cardinals.

Better public relations – promote our social justice activities more.
Better use of women – women priests.
Married priests will connect better with their community.
Embrace all – eg divorcees and gay people.
More about the people than the rules.

Review the current rules of the church and discard old ones that are no longer relevant.
Adopt new rules of the church to make the church more relevant to current times.
Get more lay men and women involved in the organisation and the Mass.
Bible studies and teach the relevance to current times. Start from younger age and through to adult years.

The rigidity of quite a few rules need to be reviewed and in simple terms made more embracing of the needs of the people.
Members of the church should not feel that they are continually being judged for any reason – eg their attendance at Mass, their relationships, their sexuality, criminal history etc.
Whatever their situation they are welcome and the more they reach out the more they will find comfort and healing.

Rather than being blinded by too many rules and expectations, we need to open our eyes and ears to be aware of those around us and be sensitive to their needs.
We need to care for ourselves and for others. In doing this we are sensing God.
The church may need to relax some of their rules so people who are not following all those rules can participate in the Catholic faith without feeling like a hypocrite (ie feeling guilty).
Education via families and schools that God will embrace everyone who reaches out to Him.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHARE A STORY ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF FAITH OR OF THE CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA THAT HAS SHAPED YOU?

The third question posed by the bishops was - *Would you like to share a story about your experience of faith or of the Church in Australia that has shaped you?* It was not possible in such sessions to capture all the personal stories the bishops have invited us to submit. But what is really important, is for the bishops to understand WHY Catholics feel the way they do. What have been the experiences in the lives of Catholics that have brought them to suggest the changes above?

Accordingly, all participants were asked to go on-line and submit their personal stories to the Plenary Council via the website. Participants were also asked to encourage their family and friends, particularly those who no longer attend Mass on a regular basis, to make a submission via the website.

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SUBMIT THE THOUGHT OF OUR CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

Thank you for this opportunity. The fact that the bishops are prepared to undertake this process of asking the laity for their input is a significant step forward. We trust that this submission will make a contribution towards the development of the agenda for the Plenary Council 2020 and to shape the future of our Church in Australia.