

# Hoping to help renew our Church via Inputs to Plenary Council 2020/2021



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## **“What is Christ asking us to make our Church today?”** (Question ‘B’)

A summary of responses to Questions A, B & C  
by Parishioners and School families

*“Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.”*  
*-Mark 16:15*

*“In times of change learners inherit the earth,  
while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped  
to deal with a world that no longer exists.”*  
*-Erin Hoffer 1973*

## Outline

- Introduction and overview
- The Parish Plenary Preparation Process
- Summary of parish responses to Questions A, B & C.
- Conclusion
- Appendices (detailed parishioner and school family responses which have formed the basis for the summary outcomes provided in this submission and associated with Questions A, B, & C).

## Introduction and overview

Following a successful process of “listening to God by listening to one another” as suggested by the Australian Plenary Council team, Parish responses to the main Plenary question (below - which we call Question B) are presented further in this report, together with responses to other directly associated before and after questions (A & C). Question A prepared us in advance to more comprehensively address Question B. A full set of informative responses to the initial question A can be read in Appendix A. Finally, Question C followed to suggest some possible ways forward.

Full responses to all questions by more than 100 respondents are included in Appendices A, B & C and underlie the summaries provided.

- A. "What does our Church look like now" (listening to one other).
- B. "What is Christ asking us to make our Church today?" (listening to the Holy Spirit).
- C. "What do we, as Church, need to do to move from A to B?" (response and action).

Throughout this process all respondents showed enthusiasm for the process and displayed a strong and collectively reassuring mix of faith hope and goodwill. The faith, however shaky, already existed. The level of hope varied but was clearly buoyed by this Plenary Council synodal process itself, the first ever attempt in the experienced history of our Church to comprehensively gather, listen to and respond to as many open and honest views as possible. A process we thankfully owe to Pope Francis and that all respondents agree must now become part of permanent, formalised, and ongoing new process. The displayed goodwill was at least somewhat conditional on what happens next.

Greatly encouraged by this synodal process itself respondents spoke with directness, refreshing honesty, and respectfully. Many found it a relief being able to openly say what was deeply in their hearts but were previously afraid to openly express. It was often reassuring for all to hear others saying very similar things. It was also sometimes a challenge to maintain respect given the substance of much that was discussed. That itself was helpful, and positive.

Despite clear criticisms comments also included much that was positive which reflected personal values and recognised many good things that, whilst often barely visible, are actually happening in parts of or associated with our Church that can become models.

While respondents mostly spoke with hope it was not boundless hope. Lest it be thought that hope alone will maintain permanent commitment to the current church that thought was dispelled. As many respondents commented people are now generally well educated and discerning, and able to be guided by their conscience as well as institutional faith.

At the same time open communal discussion in small, comfortable, non-judgmental groups proved helpful in that some with stronger hope positively encouraged others on more shaky ground.

## Overview

There have been strong clear common messages from this Parish process in consideration of the three important Questions posed in our Parish and school communities. It should also be noted that 3% were generally happy with the Church as it currently is. Guided by group consideration in the spirit of shared faith Respondents overwhelmingly indicated, amongst much else, that:

- The overall Church does not practice what it preaches in placing self-interest above morality and those it is meant to serve, especially the most vulnerable, and has understandably seriously lost trust, respect and credibility.
- There is urgent need to renew our Church, not simply rearrange deck chairs. It will take many years to heal such a badly damaged church
- At the same time there are also some almost invisible areas of or associated with our Church that faithfully and helpfully remain Christ-focused, in the process serving and helping people exceptionally well to

survive in the real world they materially live in. These areas provide invaluable models for renewal.

- We need to give higher profile to such Christ-like areas of our Church and Religious, and acknowledge very many exceptional priests and nuns.
- We should also explore promoting these social/welfare areas of the Church and perhaps attract participation by people with strong sense of social welfare and social justice, particularly young people who may no longer be active Catholics but who already share such values and may already engage accordingly.
- It is acknowledged and strongly supported that a review of Church Governance, headed by Professor John Warhurst, has been announced.
- The future of the Church depends on and would dramatically benefit from replacing its disempowering extreme hierarchical structure with a more synodal Church that is collegial, co-responsible and accountable.
- Synodality further serves as a remedy against clericalism which particularly in today's world constitutes a major barrier between clergy and the rest of the Church it is there to serve.
- Diocesan Councils, Parish Pastoral Councils and periodic Synods/Plenaries should be mandated.
- Dioceses, Parishes and other organisational units as appropriate should be required to produce annual reports.
- Clericalism needs be eradicated in all its forms, as Pope Francis regularly reaffirms.
- Renewal must happen via the 2020 Plenary and permanently result in an ongoing synodal process. Renewal must also embrace cultural change not just new processes.
- Existing male-dominance of the Church is harmful and counter-productive. Recent experiences in particular amplify the need for more gender-balanced thinking and decision making in the Church up to the highest levels.
- Despite what has been strongly expressed in the past deep thought needs to be continued more seriously on the issue of women priests and deacons.
- Many issues don't or should not need the excuse of a Plenary in order to be addressed promptly. Responding to many more Royal Commission CSA Recommendations more fully and immediately is urgent if the Church is to be moral and credible.
- The Church needs to learn how to listen (not just 'hear'), learn how to learn, and learn how to respond in today's complex ever changing world.

- Much of the visible Church has lost its sense of Christ given mission, has become narcissistically self-consumed and overly institutionalised.
- Through new learnings and understanding some bishops, as for Pope Francis, have shown leadership by acknowledging and responding to the challenges and opportunities to serve humanity via Christ's mission in the reality of peoples' lives in today's very different, highly complex and rapidly challenging world. Some others haven't, and are holding back renewal.
- Episcopal appointments and nominations should be informed by selection criteria that include those from relevant representative clergy and lay people.
- Periodic appraisal should be conducted of priests, bishops and senior managers (lay, clerical, male, female) with representative reviewers.
- To improve formation of new priests so they will more fully understand and relate to the reality of today's complex world priestly formation needs to be restructured, considering such issues as providing clerical education via existing universities rather than solely through seminaries, and including 'formation experience' by accommodation in parishes more than in seminaries.
- To help further address the serious issue of clericalism by supporting more natural and socially inclusive personal development and balance in priestly formation it is strongly recommended that optional celibacy for priests should be considered. Committed married and/or former priests should be welcomed to the ministry.

## **The Parish Plenary Preparation Process**

The Plenary input process in our Parish began well before Ash Wednesday 2018, augmenting Australian Plenary Council information with parish compiled information in print, online and via dedicated parish videos and group discussions. To build understanding and interest in the Plenary this process was maintained before the official 2018 Ash Wednesday launch. It also involved regular discussion at Yarra Deanery meetings where our particular localised Plenary preparation process evolved. Later in our Parish it involved producing additional complementary resources, facilitating discussions, promoting, and gathering response verbally, in writing and online.

Having facilitated local engagement along suggested Plenary Team lines it was very noticeable that respondents committed themselves fully to the

opportunity, not just for one but two and three sessions, listened to one another without judgement, spoke openly, honestly and respectfully, and demonstrated commitment as well as great frustration with the Church and determination for renewal.

Over 100 Respondents listened and gave deep consideration to questions, including small family groups, school groups (some including children), friend groups, Outreach group, Parish Pastoral Council, Men's Group and individuals across a wide age range. Of these 3% were basically happy with the church as it currently is.

Men's monthly Friday evening gatherings are not known for 'Church Chats' but participants insisted on engaging in each Plenary preparation session. If such examples illustrate the value of empowering and energising people to feel and show hope then this and other examples indicate what is possible in a renewed Church in which people feel personally valued, respected, empowered to speak honestly, and listened to.

At the same time it should be said that peoples' expectations have been not surprisingly raised by this Plenary preparation experience. If expectations were to be significantly mismatched given the evident high level of frustration with the current Church there is real risk that current positive energy might be quickly dissipated and reversed.

To further facilitate listening to one another Question A responses were recorded and shared via our website across our communities before considering Question B. Similarly Question B responses were shared before considering Question C.

All responses were frank, forthright and constructive. In the true spirit of the Plenary process responses were thoughtful, considered, honest, respectful, direct and helpful. There was strong similarity in what people thought. Hopefully such collective thoughts will be impossible to ignore.

Many useful thoughts have been captured and recorded. Clearly this Plenary Council itself will not be able to consider let alone act on every suggestion in the reportedly more than 68,000 submissions across Australia. In addition to being considered in their own right for the Plenary Council 2020/2021 these collected considered thoughts across Australia should also be preserved to

provide an invaluable ongoing resource for guiding ongoing future development of our Church.

The Plenary Council will surely not want to ignore or reverse all the goodwill and energy newly generated during this Plenary preparation by not seriously considering, acting promptly or avoiding significant decisions. So we hope and pray for the much needed decisive renewal of our Church that the People of God in Australia are collectively strongly calling for.

### **Summary of some key responses to question ‘A’** (full responses in Appendix A)

**“What does our Church look like now”** (listening to one other)

With deep concern high hopes and respect, responses to this question revealed the depth of passionate concern about many key areas of the Church, in particular a disappointing gap between what the Church preaches and its internal behaviour. Its overall integrity, honesty and credibility are considered disturbingly diminished, with serious consequences also for the Church. Illustrative of this are concealment, cover-up, greater concern for Church reputation than protection and abuse of the most vulnerable. A hierarchical, non-listening, non-understanding, remote and clericalist institution.

There are good things about our Church. It lives out the Christian principle of love your neighbour and care for others through its extensive and effective ministries in health, welfare, education, chaplaincy and support for the vulnerable such as the elderly, the disadvantaged, mentally ill and imprisoned.

It would be fair to say that no other organisation does more. Members of the church have a strong commitment to social justice. Priests and religious, particularly the ageing priests, have dedicated their lives to serving their communities and done that well. Unfortunately this is not adequately recognised by their superiors but is by the faithful.

Unfortunately the Church as an institution cannot be viewed so positively. It takes the form of a large bureaucracy and suffers the deficiencies of such bodies. As such it is rigid in its approach, lacks transparency and accountability. It is not inclusive but rather excludes people on the basis of perceived moral failings. Rather than being welcoming it is authoritarian and excluding. It is judgemental of how people live their lives and has little real understanding of

what is involved for lay people in doing their best to live their lives in 2018. This is perhaps not surprising as these judgments are often being made by elderly, celibate, male clerics. A classic example is the area of human relationships. Thus with the Church today there are positives and negatives the challenge is to maintain the positives and turn the negatives into positives.

Our congregations are aging and many people, stretching across 2 or 3 generations, have walked away.

How did this happen when 'Vatican 2' outcomes from 1965 were held in high hope by many? It seems that there was a considerable group, among the clergy, the hierarchy and the laity who did not/could not/ admit that the Church was not seeing the 'signs of the times'. This was especially seen in adherence to rigid attitudes on many issues and to old- style of governance, that is, power was in the hands of people with those beliefs.

This made it difficult to bring to life the Vatican 2 vision that the Church is all the People God, equally valued, and equally needed in the bringing of the kingdom to our world.

There was not sufficient recognition of greater levels of education, the need/right people had to question. What had been based on superstition was not acceptable The rote learning of old, no longer satisfied and the Church was not ready to engage with these people.

As people walked away they found 'excuses', 'explanations', it was not 'cool' to go to church, all priests are paedophiles, I'm too busy, you don't have to go to church to lead a good life etc. Others might have tried to be involved but were knocked back - for being out of place, being told it's not your job, for not doing things the 'right' way.

Yet many people still consider themselves as Catholics -'back-sliders', 'lapsed' people, C and E Catholics, cafeteria Catholics. This Plenary opportunity might reach them and renew hope.

Responses to Question A proved highly relevant and important preparation for responding to the main Plenary question, and the connection is seen in responses to the following question. With exceptions they identify loss of trust in the institutional Church, loss of credibility, loss of role models, lack of real understanding by the Church of today's world that people live in, the social economic, moral, scientific, biological, survival challenges of today. They feel overwhelmed and disempowered by an extremely disempowering, non-

understanding and extremely hierarchical Church. Young people generally feel this even more strongly. A strong theme is failure to actually listen (as opposed to ‘hear’).

### **Summary of some key responses to question ‘B’** (full responses in Appendix B)

“What is God calling us to make the Church today” (listening to the Holy Spirit)

#### **Renewal**

There is urgent need now for comprehensive renewal of our Church as a faith community. It must become far less self-centred, more Christ-focused, and learn from those often hidden but well respected parts of the Church already working quietly and effectively to help people live a better, safer and fairer life in an inequitable world, as Christ has called us to do.

Such welfare and support focused groups should be humbly highlighted in their own right to exemplify the effective Christ-driven community service helpfully provided in at least some parts of the Church. Amongst others such groups include Catholic welfare groups, particular religious orders of nuns, brothers or priests committed to social welfare in Australia or overseas, many parishes, and groups like St Vincent de Paul, Cardijn communities, and other ‘grassroutes’ Catholic communities.

As part of prompting engagement and strengthening Christ focused faith communities there is potential to promote and engage parishioners, young people with strong social conviction but who are no longer active Catholics, and others, in the work of such groups, if that proves feasible.

There is also need to clarify the meaning of the word ‘Church’ itself which has become somewhat tarnished and more distant from being a ‘Body of Christ’, ‘People of God’ and ‘Community of Faith’. There is need to return to a Church more clearly built on gospel values that exist naturally amidst diverse people in today’s complex and challenging world of continual change. Behaving this way will enable our Church to be what it is called to be, particularly at a time when people across a highly challenging and ever changing world are increasingly searching for deeper meaning, and support with life matters.

Our Church is being progressively eroded and undermined by ongoing instances of improper and even criminal behaviour, deception, cover up, and though now less frequent, insensitive responses to Child Sexual Abuse. While new processes are being introduced to help overcome these there is far more substantive work to be done in addressing underlying cultural issues.

Church Response so far to the Royal Commission Child Sexual Abuse Recommendations falls far short of addressing identified needs and now requires overdue action. As illustrated by the finance sector for example it should not take anything like a Plenary to announce some of the immediate substantial remedial steps, and plans for other changes.

Substantial Renewal is also required to address what Pope Francis calls the toxic culture of clericalism, which disempowers and dis-engages thinking people who otherwise would be very more likely to become engaged and supportive.

### **Self-limiting male dominated Culture**

The overwhelmingly male-dominated Catholic Church struggles to survive on one hand due to 'lack of resources' yet effectively denies the opportunity to acknowledge and take advantage of the 50% of women who comprise our Church and bring high skills and more balanced thinking to a Church which has been badly disadvantaged by excessively male-dominated thinking. Many senior roles in the church would immediately benefit substantially from improved gender balance up to the highest management levels. What are they thinking!

Over time and despite what has been said in the past the Church also needs to continue seriously exploring the issue of women priests.

The long established existing process of priestly formation needs review in today's world. In future this formation should depend more on using existing universities and whilst also including residency and time working in Parishes.

Episcopal appointments should be guided by inclusion of selection criteria from clerical and lay representatives of Parishes and other appropriate persons who know local needs. There should also be annual appraisal of Priests, Bishops and other Church Leaders lay or otherwise, by lay and clerical representatives.

The Church and episcopate in particular should overcome what appears often to become remoteness and detachment from ordinary lives, and insensitivity and lack understanding of today's world in which most people live challenged lives . Many bishops need to become more understanding of social, scientific, psychological, biological, psychological and even modern theological learnings.

### **Clericalism,**

Episcopal candidates should be appointed considering selection criteria suggested by appropriate priests and lay people. Periodic reviews of bishops, priests and senior managers should similarly include inputs from similarly selected persons.

### **Priestly formation**

Priestly formation needs to be reviewed, including studies in existing universities rather than at seminaries in order to provide developmental balance, and strengthen understanding of social normality. A Formation review should also explore parish rather than seminary residency

### **Vatican II Values**

Considering renewal reminds us that 55 years ago Vatican II helpfully addressed key issues involving lay participation but that these largely still need to be implemented. They therefore therefore call for return back to Vatican II and re-focus on synodality.

### **Synodality**

Most importantly the renewed Church needs to be synodal, open, transparent co-responsible, accountable and operates in subsidiarity. This Plenary Council should establish an ongoing synodal Church based on formal establishment of Diocesan Councils, Parish Pastoral Councils and regular periodic synods / Plenaries.

A formal synodal process should be established, by mandating establishment of Diocesan councils, Parish Pastoral Councils and convening periodic assemblies. Various existing groups would feed into these, including Deaneries which further afford a ready opportunity and encouragement for participation and leaning through discussion, sharing and collaboration

A successful synodal process depends on a culture of genuine and respectful listening to one another, followed by understanding and learning. Respondents see this as often absent, especially at episcopal levels. Bishops should

periodically hold open listening sessions in parishes based on principles used similarly for this Plenary Input as encouraged through the Australian Plenary Team process.

### **Accountability**

Recent history strongly calls for a far more accountable Church. Annual Reports should be published by Diocesan Councils, Parish Pastoral Councils and other appropriate organisational units and made available.

### **Structure**

Respondents believe we are being called to make our Church far less hierarchical, gender balanced in decision making up to highest Church levels and involving lay people and priests in key decision making. In summary this defines a collegial, co-responsible Church of subsidiarity we need to become. Respondents also call for a complete review of Church Governance lead by independent experts. It is understood that such a Review is to be undertaken by a group led by Professor John Warhurst.

Whilst Church of course require institutional support that operational part of the Church should generally behave like other modern institutions, with integrity and professionalism. However such an institution should not be confused with or be seen in its own right as being the Church

A newly renewed Church also provides an opportunity to review current salary payment arrangements for Parish Priests. Some Parishes are financially comfortable but with declining members many others are not. In the interest of Parish Priests and perhaps also future Priest arrangements it is appropriate and fair to now consider Parish Priest salary payments from a central pool rather than available parish funds.

### **Celibacy**

Respondents believe that celibacy should become optional for new priests to choose individually, and committed married priests and former priests should be welcomed into the Catholic priesthood.

### **Ongoing studies for a changing world**

Ongoing open and informed studies should deeply explore, inform and consider significant issues however challenging they are perceived to be, including women priests, single sex marriages, contraception, aspects of sexuality and all significant and emerging moral and theological matter.

Previously restricted internal resources, including women in senior decision making roles should be made normal so that the Church can become better balanced in its thinking and behaviour in support of a more welcoming **faith**

### **Summary of some key responses to question 'C'** (full responses in Appendix C)

"What do we, as Church, need to do to move from A to B?"  
(response and action).

The Plenary Council should introduce an ongoing synodal process that continually works closely with priests and laity at all levels with the common objective of returning to the Christ-like church that so many people called for in 'Question 'B'. This requires listening by Church leaders to the faithful on all matters that impact their lives, and listening to the priests who are the foot soldiers in the trenches, seeing how life is really lived in 2018.

Parents have great impact on their children but children sometimes have a more modern understanding of our faith than parents who studied R.E. many years ago and who still take the bible literally (e.g. Adam & Eve). Explore new means of updating parents on the changes that have actually occurred in Church thinking (practical modern theology).

The Plenary Council needs to take the steps necessary to make the Church more relevant to Christ's calling today, do more than talk but actually take bold new steps to make things happen. It must remove the internal obstacles that have hampered the Church over time and lead the Church to its current serious decline.

The Plenary Council must recognise that the Church is now dealing with a far more educated and knowledgeable community living in a world very different from the past. Act accordingly.

The Plenary Council should greatly improve Church communication, not the quantity so much as the quality, becoming a far better non-threatening listener (interactive), and acting on what is learned.

With honesty and a focus on Jesus' teachings a renewed Church should consult widely and listen to a broad range of Catholic voices, not just those who express support for the views and decisions of the hierarchy.

The Plenary should promptly deal with and finalise its response to Royal Commission recommendations as soon as possible, and also be seen doing so even at significant financial cost. Its outcomes must serve to rebuild lost trust.

Provide a stronger focus on the Gospels and Scripture and less on so-called teachings of the Church. Church to be a place where families want and like to come.

Refocus the Church on welcoming; interaction with the whole community; support for the disadvantaged; more towards social issues and gradually away from 'just preaching'.

Young people tend to have strong sense of social justice. Given that some parts of the Church or associated organisations and religious orders are already very active in this regard the Plenary should support and encourage these, opening opportunities for young people to directly engage in their activities (e.g. also including Cardijn communities).

A Church reflecting Christ needs to be inclusive. Private morality is not the business of priests.

The Church needs to be relevant and helpful to all groups. Establish advisory groups of diverse people, particularly including young people, to better understand reasons people have left / are leaving the Church.

The Plenary Council should establish a group of people with parish liturgical experience to help adapt language and practices to what comes to most people naturally, remembering it is the Joy of the Gospel we want to share. Some examples: 'Peace be with you. And also with you'; Use of consistent inclusive language; Avoiding obscure theological language (better simple than too daunting); Include some clarification of gestures (what is relevant and what is pompous).

Establish a group of pastorally experienced people to help discern how to deal with some of the Church's 'old rules'. One example is the matter of intercommunion which is very unclear, and even if not downright offensive can be very confusing.

Guided by external experts the Plenary Council should establish new principles and practices for Church governance, openness, transparency, accountability, collegiality, both-ways communication, co-responsibility and subsidiarity.

The Plenary needs to address those issues (well summarised in response to Question B) that have turned Christians away from the institutional Church, must learn to be more honest, less defensive, more visible in its social concerns and good works, and show leadership by inspiring people to use their particular skills to build the Church, including employment and empowerment of creative people and original thinkers.

Pray for guidance and a change of heart in learning from past wrongs and supporting each other.

Allow the beauty of the Eucharistic meal, the music, the homily to continue while witnessing to a new way of thinking beyond gender, without covering up, focusing ahead not on past rules that were not from Christ. Allow more interactive Masses

Priests should be allowed to marry if they choose.

Women add another dimension. The Plenary must address the role of women in the Church. There are models in Mary, Martha, Mary Magdalene and others. Allowing married priests would be a start.

Our Church is going through change. It needs to be able to reach out to young people, to help set boundaries and instil core beliefs about respecting each other and must importantly respecting one self.

After 2020 Plenary deliberations are over the faith community and general public expect action. Lack of prompt responsive action would very likely further harm the Church greatly.

There's an important need to support adult faith formation and education.

Keep Church's traditional identity and fundamental beliefs and values.

Don't be influenced by outer society to change.

Decentralise Church from a hierarchical organization to one where local congregations have a greater active role (more than just bringing Offertory gifts). Adopt more innovative ways to 'deliver the message' (Pentecostal use

song, dance, meals, volunteering days etc; Buddhists encourage group meditation; Baptists invite lay speakers on current topics).

To better engage with children and young adults teachings need to be presented in formats and language styles that these groups understand and relate to (Refer to: "Tomorrow's Catholic" by Michael Morwood).

Review the Nicene Creed (omit "for us [men] and our salvation").

The Plenary Council through its ongoing work should ensure selection of priestly candidates who are mature, psychologically assessed, socially aware and comfortable, and who deeply understand Christ's message.

Recognise the reality of fewer priests and remove the rigid requirement that only priests can preside at Sunday Mass and that Communion Services by selected trained persons can provide priest relief in such situations.

The Plenary Council should develop strategies for making communication far more 'listening' and interactive, for example establish parish 'listening sessions' for bishops, more interactive communications such as blogs, articles with (moderated) opportunity for published feedback, atmosphere of speaking openly, honestly and respectfully. Masses should allow for some discussion where appropriate.

Initiate expert studies of voluntary celibacy, married priests, women priests, divorce, contraception, IVF, same sex marriage and other important topical issues.

Greater focus on young people, not simply 'evangelizing' but also listening to, learning from, responding to, accepting and engaging.

The third rite of Reconciliation – communal confession & absolution should be reinstated. It previously attracted large attendances while current confession is sparse..

Return to the values of Vatican II. Open our doors to all. Restore life to Liturgy, Everyone is priest sharing in the High Priest Jesus. Male and female priest ordination should be open.

## Conclusion

The reasons over 100 people in our parish (≥68,000 across Australia) have responded so enthusiastically and positively to this synodal Plenary Council process for renewing our Church appear to be based both on faith and hope. That hope is for Christ's Church in which all the faithful work together as People of God for the good of humanity. Given the perceived current state of the Australian Catholic Church, and indeed the very purpose for the Plenary, the Plenary Council will surely not want to ignore the *sensus fidei fidelium*, or reverse the newly generated goodwill and energy of thinking Catholics by not making significant decisions, promptly now and ongoing into the future. The time has come. Faith may appear strong but recently regenerated hopes and what they can motivate are not boundless. They would be very difficult to restart.

On a Sunday evening TV programme 'Life Matters' many years ago Geraldine Doogue interviewed a Cistercian Abbott asking him, even at that time, if he was very disturbed at the rapidly declining state of the Catholic Church. To her visible surprise he answered 'no'. On the contrary he wisely argued that if the Church had to die in its present form in order to be reborn in a new more appropriate way then it would actually be a very good thing.

This Plenary should not be seen by any who may be less than supportive as bad. On the contrary it is great and necessary opportunity for our Church to be renewed with original values intact and clearer, even stronger in faith, and in a new collegial and balanced form that is more relevant, helpful and viable in the different and challenging changing times we now live.

This Plenary Council 2020/2021 is at a threshold in the history of the Australian Church with its last Plenary held 83 years ago. It took the Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference ten years to decide if it was necessary. We owe this to the leadership of Pope Francis and to the associated experience of Archbishop Mark Coleridge at the 'family synod' which launched a preliminary new form of synodal Church. We should be aware that in a wider spirit of global renewal the universal Catholic Church is closely observing Australian processes and proceedings for Plenary Council 2020/2021 as they unfold.

As our respondents have hopefully reinforced for themselves and as we pray together may this important opportunity for renewal in the way Christ calls us to be, not now be squandered.

## APPENDIX A

### “What does our Church look like now?”

- There are good things about our church. It lives out the Christian principle of love your neighbour and care for others through its extensive and effective ministries in health, welfare, education, chaplaincy and support for the vulnerable such as the elderly, the disadvantaged, mentally ill and imprisoned.

It would be fair to say that no other organisation does more. Members of the church have a strong commitment to social justice. Priests and religious, particularly the ageing priests, have dedicated their lives to serving their communities and done that well. Unfortunately this is not adequately recognised by their superiors but is by the faithful.

Unfortunately the church as an institution cannot be viewed so positively. It takes the form of a large bureaucracy and suffers the deficiencies of such bodies. As such it is rigid in its approach, lacks transparency and accountability. It is not inclusive but rather excludes people on the basis of perceived moral failings. Rather than being welcoming it is authoritarian and excluding. It is judgemental of how people live their lives and has little real understanding of what is involved for lay people in doing their best to live their lives in 2018. This is perhaps not surprising as these judgments are often being made by elderly, celibate, male clerics. A classic example is the area of human relationships. Thus with the church today there are positives and negatives the challenge is to maintain the positives and turn the negatives into positives.

- **Our** congregations are aging and many people, stretching across 2 or 3 generations, have walked away.

How did this happen when ‘Vatican 2’ outcomes from 1965 were held in high hope by many? It seems that there was a considerable group, among the clergy, the hierarchy and the laity who did not/could not/ admit that the church was not seeing the ‘signs of the times’. This was especially seen in adherence to rigid attitudes on many issues and to old-style of governance, that is, power was in the hands of people with those beliefs.

This made it difficult to bring to life the Vatican 2 vision that the Church is all the People God, equally valued, and equally needed in the bringing of the kingdom to our world.

There was not sufficient recognition of greater levels of education, the need/right people had to question. What had been based on superstition was not acceptable. The rote learning of old, no longer satisfied and the church was not ready to engage with these people.

As people walked away they found ‘excuses’, ‘explanations’, it was not ‘cool’ to go to church, all priests are paedophiles, I’m too busy, you don’t have to go to church to lead a good life etc. Others might have tried to be involved but were knocked back - for being out of place, being told it’s not your job, for not doing things the ‘right’ way. Yet many people still consider themselves as Catholics - ‘back-sliders’, ‘lapsed’ people, C and E Catholics, cafeteria Catholics. This Plenary opportunity might reach them and renew hope

- **Many** people of strong faith, especially older people, will still keep coming to Mass despite a now broken church, because of their faith and seen need for the Church.
- **Pope** Francis is good, newly appointed Bishops and Archbishops are good, having a Plenary is good, but damage has been done to the Church over the last 50 years that will be difficult to overcome. Many have left the Church from all age groups. Perhaps we will become a smaller Church?
- **The** Church shows some signs of heading in the right direction, but the challenge is to continue and move on, and to be more positive.
- **The** Church needs to better engage/integrate school families in Church communities.
- **It's** not a listening Church, is divided, is clericalist, has covered up its serious faults, has poor governance, lacks openness and transparency, is unapproachable and has lost trust.
- **The** church works well in some parishes but not in its own hierarchy. Its overall structure and governance need re-working.
- **The** Church is challenged by ageing and its own conservatism, loss of young people and the prevailing sense of laity powerlessness in a remote hierarchical organisation.
- **The** Church is boring, Mass language and liturgy need to adopt more of the vernacular, texts need updating, Plain speaking is not encouraged but needs to be. The Church has not successfully tuned into the magic of its own faith.
- **Women** comprise 50% of the Church but by restricting use of their talents and qualifications the Holy Spirit is 'gagged', particularly in addressing social and moral issues such as IVF, contraception and divorce.
- **The** Church is not inclusive nor encourages those with diverse needs. It offers shallow excuses for its faults. Priority is protecting physical assets rather than its congregations.
- **The** Church does not recognise/respond to the sense of irrelevance experienced within different age groups.
- The Church does not recognise the support and outreach already provided by some of its members against all odds who provide a welcoming, inclusive and encouraging environment in parishes.
- **The** Church lacks or has lost the clear vision of our Church and its role as a pillar of Christ's trust.
- **Parishes** comprise a major part of the overall Church community. There are a number of welcoming and supportive parts of the church (including many parishes, support services, social justice, charity groups and particular religious communities) that faithfully and closely follow Christ's mission. Unfortunately overall goodness within other parts of the Church is masked and damaged by behaviour and institutional structure far removed from Christ, that has lost touch both with his mission and the times.
- **The** sexual abuse scandals involving priests have seriously damaged the church, which has an uphill battle to reclaim credibility with the wider community. You cannot blame people's derision of the Church's claim to the moral high ground.
- **The** Church is over-structured, rule-driven, over-shackled by complexity and needs to change structurally to become more pastorally supportive of the community.
- **The** Church is becoming increasingly irrelevant, uninteresting to and rejected by young people who themselves ironically tend to demonstrate 'Christian' values of social justice and caring while rejecting the institutional Church and tradition for its own sake.
- **Religion** was once the basis for law and society because it offers a blueprint for human behaviour. The Church now is a shadow of itself 50 years ago and out of touch with societal changes
- **The** Church is an authoritarian organisation preserving its institutionalism as a 'raison-d'etre'. It clings to the 'here-after' rather than the present time in order to retain its power structure.

- **The Church** is very clericalist and lacks openness, transparency and accountability
- **The Church** is hierarchical, living in the past and more focused on self-empowerment and self-protection than directly reflecting the values of Christ.
- **The Church** is fractured and divided, behaving far from the community that Christ intended and exemplified. Some parishes are welcoming and inclusive while others are restrictive.
- A divided church has led to personal beliefs and witness overriding community shared beliefs and witness.
- **The Church** focuses more on archaic organisational structures than on exemplifying its Christian message. It is disconnected to today's world, overly restrictive and uninviting to young people in particular.
- **There** is a lack of respect for authority generally and for the Church. Some shameful and hypocritical stands have been taken by some church members in recent times. Chance now for renewal. Need more volunteers and commitment to help homeless and refugees
- **The Church** has poor governance arrangements and needs to learn from and take advantage of skills within the wider Church community who are often better versed and experienced in good governance.
- **Half** of the Church is comprised of women who are restricted from authority roles in a Church in which women's insights would be invaluable but are wasted instead.
- **Church** should shift its excessive focus from Vatican and episcopal rulings to more directly supporting communities through gospel values. Bishops roles are inadequately pastorally focused.
- **Church** Attitudes to marriage and divorce are out of touch.
- **People** are now better educated and discerning than to blindly obey imposed rules as they once did. People no longer accept 'Adam and Eve' as the origin of mankind.
- **Many** Bishops appear pompous and un-listening. They are often detached from most people in the community and have resulted in the Church losing relevance and perceived 'need to be churchd' by many people, particularly young people.
- **The church** has been a poor listener and needs to be more synodal and humbler.
- **People** of all persuasions are not well accepted as part of Christ's community as they need to be.
- **Attitudes** to LGBT people and victims of Child sexual abuse are very un Christ-like and turn people away. Through these and other harmful behaviours the Church has lost credibility and trust.
- **From** now as things stand the Church will become a small vestige of its former self in 10-15 year's time.
- **Our** Church congregations don't reflect all the Catholics in the area. They are either going somewhere else or not attending Church. It would be nice to see more young people of any age come to Church & Church functions. The beautiful church buildings are in need of maintenance. There are no fund raising activities outside of the parish collections. There seems to be no bridge between the school's parent & teacher committees and the parish committees. The absence of the children is very noticeable, as also the absence of religious (brothers & sisters, etc) & school teachers. In the background, almost invisible is a mighty group of dedicated Catholics who are thriving with many ministries and a wealth of experience & charity; especially communion for the sick, volunteering, choir, social justice issues, awesome multimedia, music & information updates. There is tremendous promise, just quietly bubbling under the surface & people genuinely care for each other

- **Our** Church is traditional focused and has lost relevance to a great proportion of our community (Catholic or otherwise)
- **People** feel that our Church has one set of rules for itself and another set for everyone else (e.g. protection or abusers whilst covering up complicity and silencing victims)
- **Community** expectations of nurturing faith extends beyond attending Mass and simply following tradition. People firstly want to pursue community values, behaviour and support
- **The** Church is old, tired, out of touch with community needs, non-inclusive and uninviting, not always very Christ focused
- **The** Church is Grey and dull (12, y.o. comment)
- **Church** is not inspirational (10 y.o. comment)
- **The** Church appears to have lost its purpose to help the poor, sick and needy
- **The** Church lacks transparency
- **Church** is outdated and not adjusting to today's issues such as same-sex
- **Our** Church is currently a place for worship and celebrating key days and events
- **The** Church comprises an ageing population who's capacity is stretched to the limits
- **Church** looks like a leader needing to make some tough decisions
- **The** Church is a fractured community that prefers the status quo.
- **Today's** families are increasingly leading busy and active lives and find weekly worship non-essential
- **Families** who participate in sacred celebrations appreciate and are excited by faith experiences
- **The Church** has too many layers of management
- **Church** is where we go with our class to sing hymns and to quietly pray to God (Primary school student comment)
- **Our** Church mostly comprises very few people and mostly of old age.
- **Church** lacks relevance. Attendance is more habit than spiritual engagement, mostly by stubborn people unwilling to change and unable to communicate with younger generations. This leads to search for answers elsewhere.
- **Today's** Church services show no relevance to today's issues. Many are 'angry' with the Church for not addressing long-standing issues, particularly those of a criminal nature.
- **Church** narrowly lead by elderly white males for the hearts of all sorts of different people.
- **The** Church is very focused on the needs and preferences of middle-class white older people and affluent nuclear families
- **Church** is a place of peace and love which welcomes all people as a place to follow God and renew faith.
- **Church** is full of repetitive doctrine and rules that need to be reviewed for today's world.
- **Many** in congregations are suffering (from mental health and other problems) and in our Church can't find peace and meaning in life.
- **Not** everyone is made to feel welcome or involved (e.g, some women, people living with disabilities including mental health conditions, gay people, especially the poor)
- **Provides** many valuable social services, but posh private schools and hospitals have a very high, perhaps undue, focus. Is this a just and loving use of our collective resources?
- **Denies** the lived experience of domestic violence and sexual abuse survivors and families, including childhood incest.
- **Current** use of buildings and churches is often seen as more important than needs of the vulnerable
- **Service** to others, especially outside the immediate community is often restricted.

- **Too** 'politically correct', rarely speaks truth to power. Following Christ can be challenging but should not be an exercise in niceness.
- **The** Church is not attracting the younger generation. People are not very interested and have too many other commitments. Going to Church is not a priority.
- **The** Church is male dominated. Needs more lay input and female leadership.
- **Too** much passive resistance to the Pope's message of change.
- **Catholic** schools are seen as good community schools but are valued for their academic excellence and discipline not their religious values.
- **A** shameful and hypocritical Church in the light of recent Royal Commission findings.
- **Lacks** youth inclusion.
- **Whatever** the problems are with today's Church they are no worse than in the past. The Church will survive but it's time for renewal
- **The** Church looks incompetent, badly managed, inept, clumsy and non-responsive. Its priest and bishop selection processes have been inadequate. There doesn't appear to be any behaviour auditing processes.
- **The** Church is closed, dogmatic, not 'of the people', and shows no life vibrancy.
- **The** still male-oriented Church is defensive and dependent on the environment, particularly attitudes of the Parish priest.
- **The** Church is inconsistent, e.g. in its reversal of general absolution.
- **It's** good that the 'commandments of the Church' have gone. Why were 2<sup>nd</sup> commandments required?
- **The** 'look' of the Church is of those 60 years and older.
- **The** Anglican Church is more inviting to youth and organises more activities for children.
- **Severely** damaged beyond repair, -because of its stubbornness and lethargy in responding to its crisis -refusing to admit culpability in these insidious crimes-glossing over them in soft terms, using words like abuse and hoping the issue would go away -denial at its very worst. After all we were the elite Christian church -so we thought-we grew up in the 1950s never ever being allowed in other Christian churches for funerals, weddings, baptisms etc. under the threat of mortal sin -absolutely pathetic,,As they say pride comes before the fall. How true. The church is lost and struggling to recover, loss of so many young people is incalculable-their spirituality, energy, intellect, passion, enthusiasm all getting transmitted into other directions-sadly material. As a grandmother in her 70s I struggle to understand the deceit, depravity, and degradation the church slipped into- at a time when it was preaching from the pulpit how married people should conduct their sex lives. The Catholic Church was /is obsessed with sex.
- **It** needs to be more widely and better understood that Christian Churches including Catholic continue to provide immeasurable assistance to the entire community via social service as they have for centuries.

### **What the Church needs to do wasn't asked in Question 'A' but some comments offered:**

- The Church lacks or has lost the clear vision of our Church and its role as a pillar of Christ's trust. It needs also to recognise that the Church, like human nature is messy. It needs to support body, mind and spirit.
- The Church needs to practice and protect honesty, & Introduce ongoing synodality
- The Church needs to energetically offer hope, affirmation of faith, and encouragement of religious spirit rather than just a mechanical sense of duty.
- The Church needs to pay attention to the recruitment, selection and relevant training/formation of priests, preparing them for the realities of parish life.

- The Church needs to consider further adopting married priests.
- More changes are needed so as to reach out and connect with today's way of life.
- The language used in our worship should still be inclusive and more as we speak.
- Governance. It is to be hoped this will be based on Pope Francis' vision of a synodal church, at least, in the form of an archdiocesan pastoral council.
- Significant decision making roles for women. Can women be deacons?
- Training for the priesthood: candidate selection, 'real' formation, not just 'ticking boxes'.
- Appointments of priests to parishes: Genuine consultation, A proper handover - priests and community.
- Appointment of bishops. Ongoing consideration of suitable priests, looking ahead to vacancies, allowing time for due process.
- Very important: The relationship with children in the Catholic secondary schools---- Do they have any sense of a local worshipping community? Do they have a 'grown up' view of what the church teaches?
- Marriage, Divorce, Annulment. Real life situations often the cause of 'walking away'.
- Reproductive matters: More than 50 years since the controversial Humanae Vitae. Artificial contraception widely used by people who 'would be' Catholics.
- Chance now for renewal. Commitment to help homeless and refugees
- With the church today there are positives and negatives. The challenge is to maintain the positives and turn the negatives into positives.
- Our Church consists mainly of aged persons, many are very committed to living the Gospel and express their faith in numerous ways, often creatively, both in parish life and in diverse expressions of outreach, with great generosity. What is quite obvious is that we are missing a number of generations of persons,, usually younger but also middle aged women, the latter being incredibly frustrated and still wondering if they will be listened to. Pastoral needs are usually well met, especially for the sick and bereaved.
- When ethical issues there is often reticence to speak truth to power, and a difficulty in putting the Church's message clearly and publicly.
- Clericalism and patriarchy are still keeping the Church unfree.
- The Church is tired and lacks resources.

## APPENDIX B

### “What is Christ calling us to make our Church today?”

- To continue and expand the ministries of health, education and welfare in the community. To be an open, humble, welcoming, inclusive, listening, non-judgemental and transparent church. To be a synodal church involving and listening to the faithful at all levels. To utilise the experience and knowledge of the faithful in its governance to ensure that there is compliance with all laws and the meeting of community standards and expectations.
- To be Christ centred. To be transparent in all our dealings and everything we undertake on behalf of all humanity regardless of colour, caste or creed. It is felt by many people of my generation that if women had been engaged sooner in church governance the sexual abuse crisis wouldn't have become out of hand. My non catholic friends say Catholics are snobs and elitist. I was present at a service in St Paul's Cathedral London recently and also Trinity College Chapel Melbourne University. Both services were officiated by wonderful, warm, competent women, fully embracing and reaching out without pomp. Very comforting all round. I agree with my husband who says we are missing out on this in our church. We need to be brave and break the pride nexus.
- I believe Christ is calling us to make our Church today: A place of welcome for all; An experience of faith which meets the hearts, souls, minds and yearnings of our young as well as older members of our community; A place where tradition/custom/set ways can open up and recognise opportunities for greater involvement of wider community in the liturgy of Mass; A place which serves as a bridge between good will and the outward expression of this good will towards others; A place of connection both personal and communal; A place of nourishment where not only the Word and the Eucharist nourishes us but equally important is the way we talk, interact with others and give time to building community.
- We need to encourage young people - children and adults - to come to Mass and to participate in the liturgy, and in parish events. Having school children assisting in reading at Mass works well.
- Christ calls for the church to lead by example, in all ways and at all times. Not just clergy but all people who say they are Christian also need to lead by their examples. Many leading clergy lead lives similar to very rich people. It is time for clergy to be as ordinary people and to work with them and not pontificate from above. All the church needs to be like many other current priests and nuns who live lives in Christ's name. The Church must be open to all, exist in the modern world and respond to the needs of the people in these times – where there is much stress, anxiety, family conflict etc. The Church should be there for all and allow others outside the clergy to lead and contribute as well - no more closed shop. Church attendances are falling at an exponential rate - we need to take the Church to where people and needs are. It must be relevant to a modern world and provide support and approaches for people to live good lives.
- The Church needs to acknowledge that its teachings must accept the findings of modern science (- from a Catholic educated 20 y.o. young man who seldom, if ever, goes to Church).
- The Church needs to recall Vatican II and review outdated thinking. It must show an open and truly generous response to victims of Child sexual abuse.

- Continue appreciating the beauty of the Eucharistic meal, the music, and the homily while witnessing to a new way of thinking beyond gender, not covering up for the current image of the Church when its wrong doing arise. It should focus ahead rather than on past rules.
- As Jesus was the Church should also be inclusive, and not judgemental.
- The Church should be relevant to today's needs.
- The Church should be more transparent in adversity.
- Female priests and married priests should be considered. Look at how these work in other religions.
- There should be greater emphasis on social justice and more visibility for the Church's existing involvement in this.
- Knowing that 'God the Father' loves us all the Church should call us to be responsible for our own actions, accept our differences, and not judge others.
- Service to the poor and vulnerable is more important than owning Church buildings that are 95% empty most of the time. A Faith Community can meet anywhere (e.g. in a hall, or even Tennis Court).
- The Church should value empathy and compassion more than power.
- All should be welcomed, showing Christ's never-failing love for each of us.
- Realise fully that Christ calls all people not just those it 'finds acceptable'.
- We should listen to survivors of abuse and their advocates.
- Provide a safe place for those who have been hurt, to sit and cry if that is what they need to do.
- There should be true gender equality and acceptance of same-sex marriage.
- Focus on caring for all of creation and all our brothers and sisters.
- We need to decide how to provide consistent service to the poor and vulnerable.
- Respond to Christ's message to welcome, love and care for one another without judgement, support those who are sick, disabled, blind, deaf and need care.
- Church should be dynamic, open minded, warm, totally accepting of the 'other'.
- Compassionate, welcoming, loving, empathetic, non-judgemental.
- How do we know we are inspired by the Holy Spirit?
- How did the sacraments start? When, and by whom?
- What is the connection between the grandeur and the teachings of Christ?
- Do humans need pomp to impress?
- What about Christ's admonition about selling all and giving to those in need?
- Are we doing all we can to help develop the confidence, skills and abilities of people?
- There should be more models of nuns/religious communities impressively available to assist people in need (e.g. child minding, education etc.) – such as the 'Caravan sisters'.
- The Church needs credibility based on truly being a living witness, based on gospel values and built up from local communities.
- The Church needs to be open to a mixed community, of all ages.
- Ongoing process for upward movement of opinions. Structure needs to provide opportunity for all to influence Church decisions. It should be synodal via plenary and other processes.
- Church governance should include a major role for lay of all ages, including youth, and clergy to participate.
- Inclusive, respectful, relevant and up-to-date.

- Church must be honest, uphold and stand up for what we believe, outward looking, serving, listening and responding to the community, tolerant, as a living beacon of hope and generous in spirit in a challenged world.
- Structure must ensure all laity and clergy are not ignored.
- Christ's words and actions need to be copied in the context of today's world and thinking.
- The Church should empower all its members and break down its hierarchy.
- Church needs to make clear what is 'right' and 'wrong', who is included.
- Congregations are often more educated than clergy in today's world. The Church needs to 'grow up', understand and evolve into the 1<sup>st</sup> world.
- Women who reflect 50% of the Holy Spirit are effectively non-existent in the Church Hierarchy.
- Fewer 'rules', show respect, 'listen' and 'respond' to all, including youth, be non-judgemental.
- The Church is 'all of us' and needs to be more Christ like. Catholics need to be serious about our faith and integrate faith beliefs in our everyday lives.
- People today aren't motivated as in the past, but by passion for our living (gospel) values in today's world.
- Listen to the Holy Spirit. Build upon our thoughts, practical resources and skills wherever God leaves us. We are facing the same challenges as our early Christian communities in their time.
- Need to make liturgies relevant to all – including young, older, progressives.
- A more accountable Church throughout (internationally, nationally, in dioceses, in parishes)
- Need to educate all Church members of all ages that we are collectively the Church in today's world, driven by Christ's teachings. Based on collective discernment the presently declining Church should empower and warmly encourage active engagement by all, using all our diverse thoughts, conscience and skills.
- The Church needs to 'be new', to live Vatican II.
- For health reasons use of gluten-free hosts is appropriate.

## APPENDIX C

### “What do we as Church need to do to move from A to B?”

- The Plenary Council should introduce an ongoing synodal process that continually works closely with priests and laity at all levels with the common objective of returning to the Christ-like church that so many people called for in ‘Question ‘B’. This requires listening by Church leaders to the faithful on all matters that impact their lives, and listening to the priests who are the foot soldiers in the trenches, seeing how life is really lived in 2018.
- No one should be excluded from participating in the life of the church regardless of personal circumstances or sexual orientation. In particular a concerted effort has to be made arising from this Plenary Council to fully involve women in the life of the church at all levels, fully using all their talents. This is critical. The Plenary Council should ensure that the governance of the church now changes to involve the faithful in responsible not just token roles. Governance should not remain the sole province of clerics. That is no longer acceptable to the overall faithful who equally comprise the Church. Consultation with and listening to the faithful are critical if the church is to move from A to B, that is to the Church Christ is calling us to be.
- The only way the Plenary Council can move our Church forward to a new space that practices accountability and synodality is to engage the laity as broadly as humanly possible. Our parish has many people of real competence in their professions and work places who if welcomed would willingly participate in the process of progressive change and have the capacity to inspire and bring other people into the faith community. The R.E. programs these days are very impressive because they are all tangible and relevant to the children’s world without the negativity of the old days when Father screamed from the pulpit saying how bad we were and inflicted that Catholic guilt for sins we hadn’t committed. We pray that this Plenary Council and church leaders have the courage to embrace the changes the faithful laity and many priests are so desperate to see emerge if our Christ based faith community is to survive .
- Parents have great impact on their children but children sometimes have a more modern understanding of our faith than parents who studied R.E. many years ago and who still take the bible literally (e.g. Adam & Eve). Explore new means of updating parents on the changes that have actually occurred in Church thinking (practical modern theology).
- The 2020/2021 Plenary can’t address let alone solve all the issues raised in the Plenary input process. A major outcome of the Plenary therefore should be establishment of an ongoing synodal process across the whole Church. This should be based on Diocesan Councils, Parish Pastoral Councils, all producing Annual reports, periodic synods, encouragement of geographical Deaneries to facilitate broad engagement, develop inputs and foster potential members of the more formal synodal bodies. This should be based on a ‘listening and responding’ culture.
- The Plenary Council needs to take the steps necessary to make the church more relevant to Christ’s calling today, do more than talk but actually take bold new steps to make things happen. It must remove the internal obstacles that have hampered the Church over time and lead the Church to its current serious decline.
- The Plenary Council must recognise that the Church is now dealing with a far more educated and knowledgeable community living in a world very different from the past, and act accordingly.
- The Plenary Council should greatly improve Church communication, not the quantity so much as the quality, becoming a far better. Non-threatening listener (interactive), and acting on what is learned.
- With honesty and a focus on Jesus’ teachings a renewed Church should consult widely and listen to a broad range of Catholic voices, not just those who express support for the views and decisions of the hierarchy.

- The Plenary should promptly deal with and finalise its response to Royal Commission recommendations as soon as possible, and also be seen doing so even at significant financial cost. Its outcomes must serve to rebuild lost trust.
- Provide a stronger focus on the Gospels and Scripture and less on so-called teachings of the Church. Church to be a place where families want and like to come.
- Refocus the Church on welcoming; interaction with the whole community; support for the disadvantaged; more towards social issues and gradually away from 'just preaching'.
- Young people tend to have strong sense of social justice. Given that some parts of the Church or associated organisations and religious orders are already very active in this regard the Plenary should support and encourage these, opening opportunities for young people to directly engage in their activities (e.g. also including Cardijn communities).
- Listen to what a wide cross-section of women are saying on their attitudes to women's health issues that are widely shared in our secular society.
- A Church reflecting Christ needs to be inclusive. Private morality is not the business of priests.
- The Church needs to be relevant and helpful to all groups. Establish advisory groups of diverse people, particularly including young people, to better understand reasons people have left / are leaving the Church.
- The Plenary Council should establish a group of people with parish liturgical experience to help adapt language and practices to what comes to most people naturally, remembering it is the Joy of the Gospel we want to share. Some examples: 'Peace be with you. And also with you'; Use of consistent inclusive language; Avoiding obscure theological language (better simple than too daunting); Include some clarification of gestures (what is relevant and what is pompous).
- Establish a group of pastorally experienced people to help discern how to deal with some of the Church 'old rules'. One example is the matter of intercommunion which is very unclear, and even if not downright offensive can be very confusing.
- Guided by external experts the Plenary Council should establish new principles and practices for Church governance, openness, transparency, accountability, collegiality, both-ways communication, co-responsibility and subsidiarity.
- Educate bishops / auxiliary bishops to be more welcoming, less clericalist and play stronger pastoral roles.
- Introduce progressive 'further development' for bishops in relation to social change and social attitudes, gender, scientific, psychological, medical and biologic development, technology development, interactive communication, modern business practices.
- As the Church has been badly damaged and lost much trust and credibility it needs to become more open, honest and accountable, more relevant, humbly refocusing on those parts of the Church or organisations and religious orders associated with the Church that already well understand and helpfully support peoples / needs and issues in today's world. It should act in more Christ-like ways.
- The Plenary needs to address those issues (well summarised in response to Question B) that have turned Christians away from the institutional Church, must learn to be more honest, less defensive, more visible in its social concerns and good works, and show leadership by inspiring people to use their particular skills to build the Church, including employment and empowerment of creative people and original thinkers.

- The Plenary Council will have failed if it doesn't recognise and seriously address and increase the role of women in all areas responsible for decision making in today's world.
- The Plenary Council through its ongoing work should ensure selection of priestly candidates who are mature, psychologically assessed, socially aware and comfortable, and who deeply understand Christ's message.
- Formation of priests should include studies at Catholic universities among other students, more than in seminaries, and should include experience in parishes.
- Acknowledge and remove from Parish management / involvement priests who do not practice the Gospel message in their lives.
- Recognise the reality of fewer priests and remove the rigid requirement that only priests can preside at Sunday mass and that Communion Services by selected trained persons can provide priest relief in such situations.
- Invite former priests who have married to return to ministry.
- Promote and give greater public presence to promoting the spirituality and social messages of Christ, and recognising the different needs of different people.
- The Plenary Council should develop strategies for making communication far more 'listening' and interactive, for example establish parish listening sessions' for bishops, more interactive communications such as blogs, articles with (moderated) opportunity for published feedback, atmosphere of speaking openly, honestly and respectfully. Masses should allow for some discussion where appropriate.
- Introduce process for representative parishioners and Parish priests to suggest selection criteria for associated episcopal appointments, and to suggest potential candidates.
- Introduce mandatory periodic appraisal of Bishops, Priests and Lay Leaders including selected lay people in the process.
- Provide greater support for pastors and allow more personal responsibility.
- Initiate expert studies of voluntary celibacy, married priests, women priests, divorce, contraception, IVF, same sex marriage and other important topical issues.
- Because some parishes are very small and poor and some relatively large and financially well off consider central payment of Parish priests, also allowing for families of married priests.
- Greater focus on young people, not simply 'evangelizing' but also listening to, learning from, responding to, accepting and engaging.
- The third rite of Reconciliation – communal confession & absolution should be reinstated. It previously attracted large attendances while current confession is sparse.
- The Plenary should challenge existing inequalities and ask itself do you really need to be a man to be the community pastor?
- Use education, especially for adults, to empower each member of the community.
- Listen to the Holy Spirit. People who live on the edge of our faith communities are often more in touch with God's love and mercy.
- Support and love one other, especially during time of challenge or those bearing a cross
- Listen to people of all ages. We need to listen to each other as equals in God's sight.
- Return to the values of Vatican II. Open our doors to all. Restore life to Liturgy, Everyone is priest sharing in the High Priest Jesus. Male or female priest ordination should be open.
- To welcome people to the Church they should be shown inclusion. For example those who have married a Catholic person but who belong to another Church and have

accepted the Catholic rule that their children be brought up Catholic should be welcomed at the table of the Lord to receive the sacraments at Mass.

- Pray for guidance and a change of heart in learning from past wrongs and supporting each other.
- We should all set a living example of Christ's teachings and behaviour within our community, society and family.
- Allow the beauty of the Eucharistic meal, the music, the homily to continue while witnessing to a new way of thinking beyond gender, without covering up, focusing ahead not on past rules that were not from Christ. Allow more interactive Masses
- Priests should be allowed to marry if they choose.
- Women add another dimension. The Plenary must address the role of women in the Church. There are models in Mary, Martha, Mary Magdalene and others. Allowing married priests would be a start.
- Be more open to Lay people and respect the conscience of ordinary Christians
- Priests should not try to influence political thinking in sermons. Individual parishioners have a right to their own views.
- Our Church is going through change. It needs to be able to reach out to young people, to help set boundaries and instil core beliefs about respecting each other and must importantly respecting one self.
- Many changes required in the Church (e.g. responding to child sexual abuse) don't or shouldn't need a Plenary to resolve (e.g. Banks acting before Banking Royal Commission recommendations).
- After 2020 Plenary deliberations are over the faith community and general public expect action. Lack of prompt responsive action would very likely further harm the Church greatly.
- There's an important need to support adult faith formation and education.
- Continue to provide meaningful sacred celebrations to reignite the spark in others.
- Give Youth, children and younger a voice. Engage more & further encourage Mass involvement.
- Keep Church's traditional identity and fundamental beliefs and values.
- Don't be influenced by outer society to change.
- Decentralise Church from a hierarchical organization to one where local congregations have a greater active role (more than just bringing Offertory gifts). Adopt more innovative ways to 'deliver the message' (Pentecostal use song, dance, meals, volunteering days etc; Buddhists encourage group meditation; Baptists invite lay speakers on current topics).
- To better engage with children and young adults teachings need to be presented in formats and language styles that these groups understand and relate to (Refer to: "Tomorrow's Catholic" by Michael Morwood).
- Recognise the good that has and is being done and celebrate it.
- Renew seminaries, remove clericalism and open the Ministry to women
- Review the Nicene Creed (omit "for us (men) and our salvation").
- Develop a practical sense of 'mission' via appropriate parish projects
- Make Celibacy voluntary.