****

*Your voice is needed – join in! Speak boldly and with passion, listen with an open and humble heart. With faith and guided by God’s Holy Spirit, we journey together, toward the future.*

*Together, we are on a journey of listening to God by listening to one another. All Australians are invited to engage in an open and inclusive process of listening, dialogue and discernment about the future of the Catholic Church in Australia.*

The appeal to all the Catholic people of Australia is direct.



Archbishop Mark Coleridge, president of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, said that *the Plenary Council isn’t a talkfest; it’s a time to discern, decide and act. If we do that under the influence of the Holy Spirit, things will change in unexpected and hope-filled ways*.

The Plenary Council for Australia will meet in two sessions, one in Adelaide late in 2020 and the second in mid-2021 probably in Sydney. We have begun the first phase when people are invited to contribute the fruit of their reflection and discernment. It continues until Ash Wednesday early in March 2019. This input will shape the agenda for the Council.

Individual and group contributions can be made on the Council website:

www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au

*Liturgy News* here invites its readers to reflect on liturgy and sacraments to formulate proposals which might be put to the Council. *Listen humbly. Speak boldly.*

**LITURGY AND THE PLENARY COUNCIL**

*Liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church… Still, the liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the fount from which all the Church’s power flows* (SC 9-10)*.*

One would expect therefore that liturgical questions would be prominent in the propositions put before the Plenary Council. We invite you to reflect on these questions and prioritise what you think is most important for the Australian Church at this time.

**Inculturation**

Do you think Australia needs new texts or rites or liturgical patterns for particular circumstances?

⬩ to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

⬩ to make allowance for different age groups (children, young people…).

⬩ to provide for diversity or disability.

⬩ to recognise particular seasons or issues or commemorations.

**THE MASS**

**Participation**

*The very nature of the liturgy calls all the people to full, conscious, and active participation* (SC 14). Just 10-12% of Catholics regularly attend Sunday Mass. What would encourage greater participation?

⬩ Would you aim to retain multiple churches in towns and suburbs?

⬩ Would you try to establish fewer but better resourced communities for Eucharist?

Liturgical participation by the people envisages that they are part of the Body of Christ which is the celebrant of the liturgy.

⬩ What would encourage this sense of active presence, rather than being at Mass as passive spectators? (This has to be more than just responding, singing and changing posture.)

⬩ Can you devise a strategy to give people a sense of corporate liturgical prayer?

**Communion Practice**

Review the communion practice at Mass in your parish. What decisions at the Plenary Council would improve:

⬩ the sign of breaking the bread (our unity in Christ).

⬩ the sign of receiving communion from the cup.

⬩ the sign of receiving communion from the altar (not the tabernacle).

**Preaching**

What strategy could the Plenary Council adopt to improve preaching at Mass?

⬩ training of priests.

⬩ lay preaching.

⬩ resources on the purpose of the homily.

**Music and singing**

In Australia, most parish musicians are volunteers for a liturgical ministry. To improve liturgical music in Australia, should the Council focus on:

⬩ repertoire.

⬩ training for volunteers.

⬩ employing professionals.

What strategies would you suggest?

**Translations**

Since the turn of the century, translation principles have required a literal translation from the Latin.

⬩ What has been your experience of the new translations for the Missal, and for the liturgies of confirmation and matrimony? What direction should future liturgical translations for Australia take?

⬩ We have been debating a new translation of the Lectionary for 25 years. Can the impetus of the Plenary Council help us achieve a translation which is scholarly, inclusive, ecumenical, and well-known?

**SACRAMENTS**

**Infant Baptism**

How should the Australian Church handle requests for infant baptism from non-practicing parents? On the one hand, celebrating baptism is a moment of evangelisation and welcome. On the other hand, it presumes faith and belonging.

**Confirmation**

The traditional practice and theology of the Church is to celebrate confirmation as the second sacrament of Christian initiation culminating in admission to holy Communion. However some dioceses still celebrate confirmation in adolescence as a personal commitment.

⬩ Do we need a unified national policy?

⬩ Consequently, do we need ritual options for commitment for adolescents and young adults?

**RCIA**

The catechumenate process has been a great boon for the Church in Australia.

⬩ Does Australia need further discussion and discernment of the best way to deal with baptised but uncatechised candidates?

⬩ Does Australia need a way forward for a modified catechumenal process for children of catechetical age and for adolescents?

**Penance**

Fewer people are now availing themselves of individual reconciliation. In Australia we have a strong memory of the Third Rite of Reconciliation with general confession and general absolution.

⬩ What pastoral and spiritual benefit would it offer?

⬩ Does civic legislation overriding the seal of confession make any difference?

⬩ What setting should be normative for the sacrament to protect penitent and priest?

Sin is defined as a personal act by moral theologians. Do we need a way of understanding corporate sin (relating to, for example, the environment, the abuse of children and vulnerable adults, or aboriginal reconciliation)?

⬩ What ritual forms might address forgiveness and reconciliation for corporate sin?

**Anointing and Pastoral Care of the Sick**

Pastoral problems still arise when the anointing is regarded by people as one of the ‘last rites’, rather than support for those who are suffering. What strategy might help people recognise the right moment for anointing?

**Marriage**

Fewer couples are choosing to marry in church. Sometimes they will request a Catholic ceremony outside a church. Often Catholics choose a civil ceremony.

⬩ How can the Church better support couples in preparing for and celebrating their marriage?

⬩ Who is best placed to minister to the engaged? Should married lay ministers be commissioned to prepare and celebrate the Catholic rite of matrimony?

**OTHER RITES**

**Funerals**

The funeral liturgy commends the deceased person to God’s mercy and comforts the mourners.

⬩ What need is there for lay ministers to celebrate funeral rites?

⬩ What are the implications of more frequent use of cremation and the proliferation of the parish columbarium?

**Blessings**

In 1989, Australia adopted the American edition of the *Book of Blessings* with American additions. Is this adequate for our needs or are there occasions when a blessing is required in Australia which the ritual book does not cover?

**Liturgy of the Hours**

The Liturgy of the Hours is the formal daily prayer of the Church, with Morning and Evening Prayer the two hinges of the daily cycle. Yet it is rarely used in parishes with lay people. It seems people prefer the Liturgy of the Word with communion when the Mass is not available.

⬩ Which do you think is preferable on Sunday? On weekdays?

⬩ Should the Plenary Council consider promotion of the Liturgy of the Hours?

**LITURGICAL LEADERSHIP**

The preparation and celebrations of liturgies outside Mass for communities with limited access to Eucharist is a challenge, particularly in remote and rural areas of Australia. In some places, Sunday celebrations in anticipation of Eucharist have become the norm. Questions of access to Eucharist raise fundamental questions about liturgical leadership.

**Priests**

By ordination, the priest represents the headship of Christ in the liturgical assembly, thus completing the Body of Christ for offering the sacrifice of the Mass.

According the Code of Canon Law (905), the bishop may allow a priest to celebrate Mass twice in one day or even, if pastoral need requires it, three times on Sundays.

⬩ Parishes with multiple churches often expect the priest to do more than this. In remote areas, there may also be large distances between small communities. What are reasonable expectations of priests in Australia today?

**Availability of Priests**

Many dioceses invite priests from other countries to come to Australia ‘on mission’.

⬩ Is this a good policy to assure the celebration of the Eucharist?

⬩ If this is to continue, what does Australia need to put in place to help these priests to adapt to Australian culture, to learn English or ameliorate their accent?

Another strategy is to increase the number of Australian-born priests.

⬩ Do we need to ordain married men, allow priests to marry, re-admit to ministry suitable priests who have left the ministry to marry?

⬩ Is there a place in rural areas for part-time priests who could assure Sunday Eucharist and certain other priestly functions?

**Training of Priests**

People are asking questions about seminaries. Is the Tridentine model formation and academic study in a closed community the best for preparing priests today? , More specific questions which the Plenary Council may wish to consider include:

⬩ the availability of comprehensive courses in liturgy and the sacraments.

⬩ formation of ordinands in the ‘ars celebrandi’ (voice, gesture, movement etc)

⬩ how to prepare and deliver good homilies.

On-going formation and training for ordained ministers is very important.

⬩ What is required in terms of in-service opportunities?

⬩ What structures will provide professional supervision and support?

⬩ Is there a need for a national strategy or at least the collaboration of dioceses in a given region?

**Deacons**

The Plenary Council may wish to review the use of the Diaconate in Australia.

⬩ How and where is the diaconal ministry exercised? What opportunities does it present?

**Lay Leadership in Liturgy**

Lay leadership is possible in presiding at baptism, marriage, funerals, Liturgy of the Hours, Liturgy of the Word with and without communion, ministry to the sick, and certain blessings.

⬩ Some of these provisions have not been activated by the Australian bishops conference and are rarely used.

⬩ Lay preaching will provide new opportunities to connect the scriptures with everyday life.

⬩ A lay pastoral director is the leader of the parish community.

What should the Plenary Council consider on lay leadership in liturgy?

**Women’s Leadership**

In Australia’s equal opportunity culture, particular attention needs to be given to the role of women who may be appointed to preside and preach at the liturgy, lead parish life, and provide expertise for training in liturgy.

**Training for Lay Ministry**

Training opportunities are available for lay ministers (readers, communion ministers, musicians). More is required if we are to recruit lay presiders, preachers, or pastoral directors.

⬩ How would training in liturgy and sacraments, and formation for pastoral leadership be provided in an accessible and cost effective way?

⬩ Since it would frequently be required in remote areas, is online learning a suitable method?

**EVANGELISATION**

How might the Plenary Council debate more abstract issues?

**Nominal Catholics**

The feasts of Christmas and Easter and the celebrations of baptism, confirmation, marriage and funerals bring to the liturgy Catholics who are alienated from Church life. They are great opportunities for outreach.

⬩ The Holy Spirit can touch people’s lives through an experience of welcome and hospitality, interest and care, and engaging with an active and committed community.

**Inclusion**

A liturgy which is inclusive of all – those of a different culture, language or lifestyle, those with a disability or who are disadvantaged in any way – can be a powerful witness to justice and a sign of respect for human dignity.

**CHURCH ARCHITECTURE**

**Reordering Liturgical Spaces**

The sacred space of the church building and the provision it makes for the worthy celebration of liturgical rites contributes substantially to the understanding and experience of the liturgy.

⬩ Now, sixty years after the reform of the liturgy, may be a good time to remove any remaining ‘temporary’ altars, ambos and fonts.

⬩ A thorough review of churches in light of *And When Churches Are To Be Built (2014)* is warranted.

⬩ The Plenary Council may need to consider the processes to be followed when churches are to be closed or communities amalgamated.

**Sacred Art**

Art in churches should be the real work of good artists. Mass-produced reproductions are not worthy.

⬩ Quality contemporary artwork would build bridges between Church and the world and articulate the faith for the present age.

**ADMINISTRATION**

**Diocesan Commission for Liturgy**

To promote the liturgical apostolate, Australia as a whole and individual dioceses are to have a commission on the liturgy, supported by people with expertise; they may work with or be combined with commissions on music and art.

⬩ Is there a structure here to carry through the liturgical proposals of the Plenary Council?

**NOW BEGIN**

Having reviewed this long list of possibilities, you are ready to begin your discernment and embark upon the consultation process for the Plenary Council. Listen carefully to what the Spirit is saying to the Church. Find wisdom in your reflection.

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

Now speak boldly.