

Q2. What questions do you have about the future of the Church in Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider?

Leadership

So how do we go back to the drawing board?
How do we begin?

Shall we go back to basics?

Have we forgotten the basics of our faith? The two commandments Jesus gave us.

1. To love our God with all our hearts, our souls, our minds and our strength, **AND**
2. To love one another as he loved us

Are we, as a faith community, on that same path Jesus set out for us? Or have we strayed?
Have we lost our way? Has it become all too political?

Are we so engrossed in the troubles of the universe that we neglect things closer to home or in our own backyard so to speak? Do we have the courage, humility and the vision to explore avenues not traversed before, in order to save our faith, our Church...Christianity?

When new strategies are necessary in an organisation, it often leads to Reorganisation or Restructure. Where to from here? Is a restructure necessary?

Will the Plenary Council consider that a hierarchical review and reassessment is necessary?

Our faith leaders are our priests (the ordained). What part, do they play, and do they represent the wider community? What of the Laity in our community? Who is the Laity? My understanding is they are the faith community minus the ordained. Should the Laity have a voice and play a more significant role?

Do we sufficiently promote diversity and do we have a strong representation of it in our parishes?

REVIEW: REASSESS: REALIGN: REFRESH

Will the Plenary Council re-evaluate all aspects of the church and our faith as it currently stands?

THE AGILE APPROACH

In today's business world a popular and successful methodology being introduced across the globe, is that of Agility. It's a practice promoting flexibility and openness amongst **leaders**, and their willingness to empower their people and give them a voice.

THE YOUTH

What of our Youth? Are they the answer?

Will they bring us into the new Millennium?

As always Children are the future and if we teach them and guide them, they will lead the way. With innovation, determination and a fresh perspective, they will use New Ways of thinking to revitalise, re-energise and preserve Our Faith our Church.

Faith Development

As our Church journeys into the 21st century it must identify the key elements of its mission in bringing all people to salvation and informing them that they are precious and unique in God's eyes. She must recognise the pressures of modern life, the constant challenges of technology, and the evil of consumerism. She must try to discern what is right and true and advocate for those in our society with no voice.

Our Church leaders should incorporate the laity in assisting people in their faith journey. Whether it is by listening to their reflections on scripture, articulating how God is working in their lives or empowering youth so that their image of God and spirituality is given credence, respect and value.

Our liturgies need to be relevant and the Church needs to respect the wisdom, spirituality and perspective that the laity can bring to organising and leading them.

We recognise that parents are the first and foremost educators of faith in their children. This is an awesome role but one that the entire Church community needs to support. Sacramental preparation is also an opportunity for our Church to nurture, inform and support the faith journey of all those involved.

Similarly, Catholic education is a great legacy built on a huge sacrifice of many people of great faith and vision – it needs to be protected and supported at all costs. However, it must be relevant and respectful of the Gospel values on which it is founded.

Our parish of St Paul Apostle, started forty years ago as a small faith community in the South East suburbs of Melbourne. In its early days everyone was welcomed, everyone had a voice. Everyone was known by name and felt they had an integral role to play in the growth of the Endeavour Hills Catholic community. Of course, as the years went by, growth happened, the population increased and more demands were put on our Church leaders. Our faith community recognised even in those initial stages that the laity were instrumental in assisting the ordained to produce liturgies and faith education experiences that were meaningful, reflective and prayerful. This trust of laity is unique and something still highly valued by our Parish today.

In truth, we try and model the example of our patron St Paul Apostle. As one who initially rejected Christianity, he was open to a transforming conversion experience that empowered him to become a zealot for evangelization. He was responsible for the spread of the gospel message in the world of his time and moulded the faith experience of many communities.

St Paul Apostle Parish is sincere in its endeavour to look for opportunities to deepen the faith of its members. As our Parish prayer articulates "*God, Creator and Life-giver we thank you for*

the gift of one another in our Parish of St Paul Apostle. Bless us and our families with the power of your Spirit. Inspired and motivated by St Paul's courage and commitment to the person of Christ, may we continue to be open to change and challenge! Make us passionate and courageous in our mission of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ." We are a community trying to deepen our faith while at the same time making a real difference in the modern world, we find ourselves in.

In conclusion, we adamantly believe that the Church has a fundamental role in developing and forming an individual's personal faith and supporting that individual on their faith journey. It is timely to remind her that this is a divine responsibility that must never be neglected or down played.

Faith Communities

As our Church moves to the future, it is critical that those who are working to discern the Spirit's call nurture our faith communities and their future mission led culture. Using the model of the early Christian Church, as outlined in the Book of Acts and other references in the New Testament, our Church must be characterised by

- Belief in Jesus and his teachings
- Being One in the Eucharist
- Being One in Prayer, and
- Being One in love for one another

So, our future Church needs to nurture life and support people to live it to the full. It must continue to walk with the hopeless, helpless and downtrodden with a sense of empowerment, companionship and empathy for every individual. Our faith communities need to be encouraged to speak up for those who have no voice and to have leaders that share their enthusiasm for social justice. We need to reach out and actively embrace and include those on the fringes, those who are hurting and those who are alienated and challenge the "bureaucracy" to make a difference to their lives. In particular, we must redress the injustice done to victims of abuse and tap into the passion, creativity and spirituality of our entire Australian youth.

Our Church must become contemporary and authentic. It must identify, embrace and be empathetic to real life issues and address them with kindness respect and love. It must reach out and transform our world so that the Spirit of God becomes more active, alive and visible.

Our Church needs to be identified as a community of believers that are united and energised by Eucharist and prayer, but respecting the baptismal vow that empowers all of us to share in Christ's death and resurrection.

This has implications for the leadership of these communities and the laws that the Church has created and currently implements. Leadership must be shared and respected – both lay and clerical. Working in partnership to continue to build the body of Christ is the

fundamental essence needed for our Catholic Church to be seen as visible, vocal, ethical and compassionate.

The Plenary Council needs to reflect on the Church's current identity and introduce fundamental mission led and structural change if it is to thrive and perhaps survive in the 21st century. It must reflect on its current relevance and the extent that it seeks to live out Christ's mandate "to love one another".

In many ways our Church must revisit its roots and mission – to assist in the work of salvation and strengthening each member of our faith community to strengthen their own faith relationship with Christ. Using the model of the Good Shepherd, the whole church should address the murkiness of life, to get its hands dirty and to care for each of its members in a manner befitting their unique dignity and beauty.

Hierarchy

The body of bishops are considered the successors of the apostles and they are the ones who have attained the highest form of priesthood. They comprise the pastors and leaders of Our Church or rather are Our Church representation. The times in which we live today are very different from those of the 11th or 12th century and these will continue to evolve for Our future Church.

We must embrace the power of Our Church as one body of Christ and have equality of gender in all decision making. Our Church must embrace the knowledge of the priests and laity and together we can make Our Church a better place to feel wanted, welcomed and listened to.

Scripture says: Jesus entrusted His own **mother** to **His** beloved disciple John. "*Woman, behold, your son.*" "*Behold, your mother.*" Jesus looks at all **of us from the Cross** and says, "**Behold, your mother.**" This is a clear invitation for Mary to be the Mother of Our Church.

The story of the woman at the well. Jesus tells her "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, the woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am He, the one who is speaking to you."

After Jesus rose from the dead, three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, came to anoint Jesus' body, and a young man in white inside told them that Jesus had risen, Then the women "fled from the tomb".

All the above instances give us an insight that Jesus respected women and hence the role that women must play is an important part in the Church. The place and role of women and men in Our Church will be "a must" in the future. Women must also be included in the decision making within Our Church. Times are changing and so the present culture of Our Church has to change as well. We must also have a National Pastoral Council and Diocesan Pastoral Councils so that women can participate in church duties and be elevated to high positions.

There will be shortage of priests in Australia in the future. We will need leaders from the laity. Priests must support the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the laity. There will be a need for an ongoing formal place for the laity to discuss/redress decisions taken by clerics. The Laity

has different insights and views to the priest. The Laity does consist of both men and women and must be given the power of Shared Leadership in Our Church.

How can our Church be revitalized? The job description of priests must be reviewed. They are handling finances of Schools as well as carrying on their priestly duties. Should there be another portfolio where someone else could look after the wealth creation of the Church as we all know that the Church has expenses and administrative requirements. There must be transparency in Our Church. The people coming to Church must have Trust in the Hierarchy. Our Church is to follow Jesus and not the priest. The meaning of priesthood must be reviewed. This should address whether ordained priests can marry or continue to take the vow of celibacy?

Why should the current hierarchy be all powerful? There should be love and humility. The spirit is challenging us to think and act differently for Our Church to survive and live on.

Healing and Inclusion

How do we bring Healing into Our Church Communities after the Royal Commission into Child Abuse within OUR Church and the cover up and transfer of a priest involved from Parish to Parish – there is much to heal for the broken and much to rebuild with the loss of trust?

How do we the Laity move on when we feel we have not been listened to?

How do we learn to trust again?

We cannot ignore the problem as this only helps the problem to fester instead of finding a way forward to healing.

In Jesus' words in Mark's Gospel: *'And he said, 'what comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man comes evil thoughts. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man'.* (Mark Ch. 7 v20-21, 23)

What can we do to help ourselves?

During our parish conversations it has been suggested Purification/Re-sanctification of Our Church communities. This will only be achieved through a more active laity working with and alongside our Bishops in leadership roles and governance. Trust works two ways; maybe our Bishops also need to learn how to trust the laity in charting a way forward. The structure within the Catholic Church – Our Church – needs a total review, not just by Bishops and Cardinals but with the laity, a worldwide Plenary Council.

98.5% to 99% are laity – 1.5% to 1% are clerics, justice also needs to be seen to be done through appropriate representation.

This would be a great time to re-introduce 3rd rite reconciliation for communities with our priests and Bishops. We are taught love is the greatest of all gifts, but for love to be the greatest gift there first has to be forgiveness. Forgiveness of what comes out of us, our

thoughts, our feelings of anger, disbelief, standing by and doing nothing, feeling helpless to be able to change things, broken trust.

We have healing Masses and the Sacrament of Healing for the sick and dying or for someone struggling with life's problems. Could we 'marry' up the 3rd rite of reconciliation with a healing mass in all Parishes within Australia as a ritual for healing and forgiveness as a way forward after the Royal Commission into Child Abuse?

Another way forward would be for our Bishops to put into place a 'congress' of the laity to talk to one another. For we are a Church Community of divide and conquer where the laity in one parish hardly ever meets to just talk to each other, or with others from a neighbouring parish. To talk and discuss what is working and what is not working within OUR Church/Parishes with the Bishops Council – to work with each other for the common good of all – together would be a significant step in the right direction.

Within OUR Church, there are great men working away in their parishes, leading and caring for their 'flocks'. These men have also been let down. Working together with and through them, we can make a difference – a great difference for good in our world. Learning from our mistakes are and will be our greatest learning tools to be more Christ like. We have the ability to forgive; we have the ability to show love in spite of everything.

'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning a sixth day'. Genesis Ch. 1 v27, 31

Inclusion means:

- To be honest with each other
- To speak up and state our true feelings in our relationship with our Creator and where it is at now
- To remove what prevents us from answering God's call to live out our service to God and each other to our fullest potential
- To find together a way forward

A man sits at his dining room table reading his newspaper, a young child not yet three years old, walks up to the man and starts to speak to him. The man turns and looks at the child for some time. The man turns back to his newspaper picks it up and turns his back to the child and continues to read. The child stands there wondering what just happened.

Our Church's Canon Law, as it is currently structured, does not encourage inclusivity. According to Canon Law No 9

'Laws concern matters of the future, not those of the past, unless provision is made in them for the latter by name'.

And Law No 27

'Custom is the best interpreter of laws'

For the future health and wellbeing of our faith communities, review and amendments to parts of Canon Law are required, particularly Laws No: 205 and 208 as well as all other Canon Laws discriminating against the laity from full membership within *Our Church*.

This need for review has its roots in Paul's letter to the Galatians, (Ch:3, v 27, 28)

'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus'.

Canon Law No: 208 in particular has become the linchpin for a 'get out of jail free card' so the baptized cannot enjoy full membership and inclusion. Why do Our Sacred Fathers refuse to change their attitudes towards understanding they don't have to do it alone, but in partnership with the laity.

This can be the future lifeblood for the Body of Christ.

Social Justice

Jesus' gospel message in his commandments to love one another as he loves us and to love our neighbour as ourselves needs to be fully authenticated, respected and have true recognition in our future Church.

This will happen when all parts of our Church respond fully and with conviction to the cry for protection of children and all vulnerable people including the isolated and marginalised, and to the needs of those who are the victims of abuse by Church personnel and the Church's subsequent response.

Our future Church, if it is to remain contemporary and true to Jesus' mission and teachings needs to be more compassionate and show greater openness, humility and justice within and without its communities more generally, and with people of all faiths.

It must listen carefully to the cry of the poor, and the cry of the earth and actively embrace and consciously and faithfully action the messages of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si*: On care for our common home. It needs to act courageously and speak more forcefully on issues of justice, particularly those close to home (eg. Policies on refugees) as well as globally.

Reaching out, welcoming and including all people who are marginalised should see our Church returning to its "roots" rather than be a Church of symbolism, clericalism and hierarchy that has been its evolution since the days of Jesus walking the earth. It can lead and re-engage all peoples (including those who have turned away) by taking compassionate responsibility for addressing those complex issues that deeply affect the lives of individuals and families including (but not exclusive to) loneliness, substance abuse, family violence, cultural diversity issues, social media and consumerism.

Our future Church should be an open and welcoming community and resist any temptation to exclude, truly be the heart for Jesus teachings in Australia, a community where all identify with their Church and where the laity (including lay men, women, youth and our indigenous peoples) experience equity and feel truly “at home”.

For our Church to thrive we need to actively embrace and make a place for all people of faith and good will, especially the many thousands who are working in our schools, communities and organisations to live the Gospel mission of Jesus, allowing the Spirit to work in them and in us and in the people we serve. Our priests, religious and clerics must be supported as equal colleagues in the Body of Christ to foster a culture where clergy are the pastoral leaders in our faith communities, not administrators. The administrative roles can be carried out by skilled lay people.

Throughout this challenging period, we must continue to be open, merciful and loving while remaining grounded and informed of our rich traditions. The consequences are to remain boldly Catholic – to speak the truth and to be always ready to give an account for the hope, courage and hospitality that we hold.

As Archbishop Mark Coleridge has written: ‘There has never been room for complacency in a church that seeks to be at the service of humanity.’ Overcoming scepticism, rebuilding trust and growing hope will require cultural change on a large scale.

Care for our Common Earth

Our future Church in Australia has a significant opportunity to address, influence and demonstrate leadership as outlined in *Laudato Si*. To date, it has been relatively silent on the matters raised in this Encyclical including pollution, waste and the throwaway culture, climate related issues, the issue of water and loss of biodiversity and global inequality. With increasing extremes of these societal and climactic experiences, faith communities need to turn their attention to addressing their severe impacts both socially and economically as well as environmentally. As Pope Francis states, these three elements are intrinsically linked.

We need a focus on the Gospel of Creation described in *Laudato Si*. We humans, according to the teachings of Jesus, must take our place within creation, not stand outside it in a superior position. It is a distorted view of human life that claims we are better or more important than the rest of creation. In a purely practical sense, our future Church can integrate concepts of human and cultural ecology into faith development and liturgies and can engage its communities in activities both spiritual and practical to embrace the messages of Pope Francis and his predecessors.

We have a responsibility to educate and instil values with our children and youth so they continue the important stewardship of our natural resources and lands. They can be a source of the cultural change that is needed. Working with our faith schools and broader faith communities, our teachers and parents as first educators, we can raise awareness and change behaviours and practices to reduce the current decline of our earth.

There is also a very compelling argument to engage with our indigenous communities to receive their wisdom and guidance on respect for our precious land and how we learn from them about how we should be caring for our common home in both urban, regional and rural communities. Our future Church as a community of faith needs to acknowledge and fully embrace the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart produced from the gathering of our indigenous nations.

“Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first Sovereign nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs.

This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from ‘time immemorial’, and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land or ‘mother nature’ and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one-day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?”

What a unique and rich opportunity for our future Church to learn from the wisdom of our indigenous peoples who have lived in harmony with our Australian land for sixty thousand years! In concluding, Pope Francis challenges us to *“Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve for sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life”*.

Q3. Would you like to share a story about your experience of faith or of the Church in Australia that has shaped you? (500 word limit)

To put this question in context, a brief history of St Paul Apostle (SPA) is appropriate.

SPA began 40 years ago in the South East Suburbs of Melbourne. For the first 20 years, we had the privilege of being shepherded by Fr Frank Martin and Fr Gerry McKernan. For the last 20 years, we have been cared for by the Passionist congregation and under the leadership of Fr John Pearce CP, Fr Tim O'Toole CP, Fr Xavier CP and Fr Kevin Dance CP, and with the support of many other members of the Passionist order, in partnership with the Passionist sisters, Brigid, Joan, Anne and Karen, we have been introduced to the theology of Christ crucified.

We have been fortunate in Our local Church to have formed a unique and progressive community, Our local Church leaders have empowered and trusted our lay members in a partnership where the Spirit has been allowed to continue the work of evangelization, healing, social justice and compassion.

Our parish motto is: *"One Family"*. Our existence is to live as one family – a partnership and mutual existence between clerics and laity.

This does not mean it has always been "smooth sailing". This diversity and the inclusivity of laity with both the Diocesan and Passionist priests has been challenging. However, this challenge has allowed our faith and the community to adapt and change with the times. As a faith community, we will always continue to face significant challenges, in faith development, leadership and administration, but we always do/ have done this together.

The future challenges we see include the shortage of priests in Australia; engagement of our young people; the perceived narrow direction of liturgy including restrictions in music, prayer and language at both local, national and international levels (for example, the songs we sing and the prayers we recite). And so, we become a dictatorship instead of a democracy.

Our SPA Community has always strived to be a welcoming faith community. There have been many "Groups" who have formed, gathered and moved on during SPA's 40-year history. They have formed with a sense of need but have not continued when this need has passed or another has emerged.

Some of these have included: Family Passionist Group; A Community Interfaith Dialogue; The SPA Justice Peace and Integrity Committee; CanCare; St Vincent de Paul; The Soup Van; Passionist Companions Reflection Groups; the SPA Pastoral Council and youth groups to prepare and host pre-World Youth Day Passionist retreats, to name but a few examples – there are many more.

Our SPA community has always had faith development as its focus. Examples of this include opportunities for faith retreats; vibrant liturgy development groups; Passionist Companions; Lector and Eucharistic Ministries; and lay support in preparing homilies (which ceased due to direction from the Archdiocese at the time).

SPA has a broad cross-section of many cultures and has worked hard to be inclusive and respectful of different faith journeys leading to a wide variety of prayer and education experiences e.g rosary, divine mercy, exposition, Way of the Cross, Pilgrimage, Youth Stations of the Cross, Lenten reflections, social justice forums.

In terms of Leadership, all leadership ministries have been open to a broad representation from our community inclusive of gender, race and age. Lay formation in leadership has been encouraged and actively promoted for many years, encouraging and financing attendance at workshops and seminars in the various aspects of Parish life.

We continue to work towards highlighting and supporting the vulnerable in our local and wider community through social justice movements, visiting the sick, prayer groups and supporting the needy through hampers, soup van, St. Vincent de Paul and education forums.

Engaging and supporting our youth is a future challenge. We need to find a way to continue to engage and inspire them to grow Our Church and our faith. This may need very different approaches to those used previously. We need to understand our Millennials, Gen X, Y and Z. Let's lend them an ear, give them a voice and a respect, so they feel empowered and willing to dedicate their time to help build up Their Church and our future.

In closing, however we tackle the topic of Leadership in our church, whether we continue as is, or we incorporate the Laity and the Youth, let's be open to change and challenge, let's be inspired and motivated to grow and evolve. Male and female, ordained and laity, young and old, let us as equals find a way forward in the way Jesus taught us which is with love, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience but above all LOVE.