

Helping to Renew our Church via Inputs to the '2020 Plenary Council'



Capture of parish and school community responses to Question 'C'

Introduction

With minimal editing or removal of repetition at this stage the following responses have been captured from a mix of small groups and individuals in our Parish and school communities in answer to the **third** and final Question (C) addressed in our Parish **“What do we as Church need to do to move from A to B?”**. As suggested ways forward these responses follow initial consideration of questions A & B as pre-published on our website.

Respondents included small Family groups, School groups, Friend groups, Outreach group, Parish Pastoral Council and individuals of all ages, as part of the process of “Listening to God by listening to one another. The set of A, B & C responses will be summarised in a final overall report for submission to the Church’s Plenary Council agenda-setting group, and our local Archbishop Peter Comensoli, before the due date of Ash Wednesday (6 March) 2019.

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 and co-responsibility.
- 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).