

PLENARY COUNCIL 2020 LISTENING AND DIALOGUE SESSION – 18TH OCTOBER 2018

Attendees: 80 (60% Female, 40% Male)

The Parish of Our Lady of the Way* (the Parish) is centred on North Sydney and includes the churches of North Sydney (St Mary's), Kirribilli (OurLady Star of the Sea) and Lavender Bay (St. Francis Xavier). It has been under the care of the Society of Jesus since 1878.

The Parish gathered together as a community on the 18th of October to prayerfully discern the topics and issues which they believe require addressing at the upcoming Plenary Council 2020.

The summary outlined below represents the notes taken by individuals and groups on the night during discussions, and forms a submission to the Plenary Council in the formation of their agenda.

When the document refers to 'The Church', it is referring to 'The Australian Catholic Church, and by extension the Roman Catholic Church'. Thirteen hundred parishioners attend Mass each weekend.

KEY TOPICS (discussed)

PRIESTS

- The reality is a **lack of priests, ageing priests, questionable efforts to recruit priests from other countries and priests who do not engage with their parish.**
- The Church should consider the abolition of compulsory celibacy for Priests (many are already married) , as well as the **Ordination for Women.**

CHURCH TEACHINGS

- Current church teaching and emphasis on sexual morality and sinfulness are impediments to Church relevance, credibility and connecting with the people of God.
- The behaviour of the many ordained and hierarchy represent serious hypocrisy on these issues and cast serious doubt on the teachings themselves.
- The Church should consider the **modernisation of church doctrine**, and the **adoption of contemporary theology.**
- As a Church we must reflect more deeply on the **Image of God**, and aim to place **Christ at the centre** of all our endeavours.
- In response to Pope Francis' call for Care for our Common Home, we must do more to implement the challenges asked of us in **Laudato Si.**

INCLUSION

- The Church must **welcome all to the Communion** we share in, as well as **reaching out** to those whom we are not engaging with.
- We must leave judgement to God.
- Our focus and priority should be centred on love, care and compassion for all.
- The Church should specifically welcome **Divorced & Re-married Catholics**, those identifying as **LGBTQI, Women, & the Marginalised.** We need their forgiveness for all the wrongs done to them by Church teaching and behaviour.

WOMEN

- Women, as mothers, teachers, principal carers, are and always have been the most significant teachers of Christ's message. They are at the coalface and are key to the most relevant and trusted relationships. So why does the Church not listen to them and fully accept their leadership?
- Women, as representative of over half of all Catholics worldwide, should play an **active, significant and genuine** role in the Church, especially in **decision making** at all levels of the hierarchy.

- Women should be **equally represented** at all levels of the church, including Church & Diocese staff, the Diaconate and the Priesthood.

LITURGY AND THE SACRAMENTS

- The **language of our Sacred Liturgy** should be **inclusive**, should make **sense** to all, and use today's **vernacular**.
- The Church must re-introduce the **3rd Rite of Reconciliation**, and make it available to all Catholics.
- The **access** to and the positive **promotion** of all the Sacraments should be restored.

CHURCH RELEVANCE

- The Church must examine and consider its **relevance** to the lives of the current and **future** generation.
- There is a need for the Church to change its **structure**, and reach out to the margins.
- We must focus on **rebuilding** the 'Catholic brand'.

YOUTH

- There is a constant need to genuinely listen to and **engage** young people in their faith.
- We as a church must **encourage, inspire & give voice** to young people so that they might have **ownership** over their faith.
- The Church must be careful to ensure that it is not simply listening to and supporting traditionalist youth; the currently disengaged have a faith and a life's experience which must be sought out

EVANGELISATION

- We as a Church must evangelise through **care for all**, inspired by Jesus Christ.
- There is a constant need to engage in **Interfaith Dialogue** and also dialogue with those of little or no faith.

THE ROLE OF THE LAITY

- The Laity, some of whom have higher theological education than priests, should be **involved** and **respected** in **decision making**.
- The lived experience of the laity is frequently not respected or understood by Priests and Bishops
- Priests and Bishops should be more **consultative** with all laity, including a **delegation** of duties.

OUTREACH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- The Church must **strengthen its focus and priority** on outreach initiatives, especially by members of the hierarchy.
- The Church must publically and bravely lead on these issues.
- As a matter of priority, the Church must
 - o **Meet the poor and disadvantaged and all at the margins, with all the gifts we have**
 - o **welcome all refugees and migrants**
 - o **actively respect and reconcile with our original inhabitants**
 - o **Care for Our Common Home.**

CLERICALISM

- The Church must clearly address **power** and the **culture of clericalism**, which prevents all people and communities from being fully active in the life of their church.
- Transformation of clerical control could be achieved by **integrating the laity**, especially women into the hierarchy.
- All Ordained Clergy should adopt the signs, symbols and genuine behaviour of **servant leadership** and do away with symbols of **superiority, pomp or difference**.

SEXUAL ABUSE

- The Church should do everything it can to ensure the **Protection of Children** in its care.
- Members of Church leadership must **acknowledge the failures** of Leaders in our church.
- As a matter of priority, the Church must sign on to the **National Redress Scheme for Victims of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse**.

COMMUNITY

- Our Parishes, Dioceses and Schools are spreading our **resources too thinly** as a faith community.
- We should aim for the **Parish to be at the centre** of the faith community.
- Parishes should ensure that they are **reaching out** to the marginalised in their community, accompanying and assisting in any way they can.
- Parishes/Communities must be reformed to reflect the absence of priests and the important role of the laity in a new way of Church

TRANSPARENCY

- The governance structures of the Church must be **transparent** and held **accountable**; no reform will work long term without it.
- No transparency = no trust.
- **Diocesan Synods with strong lay representation/role are needed** .

PARISH

- The **Parish Council** should be revived, with **Parishioners having a real voice** in decision making processes.
- There is a need for better transparency/**dissemination of information** in Parish operations.

LEADERSHIP

- The model of leadership for all levels of the Church should follow Pope Francis' call to **Servant Leadership**.
- There must be structures in place to ensure **succession planning**, by **identifying leaders** & introducing **mentoring** and **training** programs.

This draft submission was published to the Parish in hard copy handouts at Sunday Masses, notice in the Parish Bulletin and on the Parish Website. Many verbal responses were received in support of the draft Submission.

Three written responses were received:

RESPONSE ONE

This response suggested that the topics be listed in order of importance as viewed by the author, favoured a weighting of the responses, felt that some issues such as Laudato Si and Social Justice were over stated and that one issue, the effect of homosexuality on clerics, was overstated. We have considered this response. We believe that the Parish Submission fairly and accurately reflects the views of those who attended the meeting and/or responded to the Draft. We have noted that this respondent has made a Submission independently of the Parish submission.

RESPONSE TWO

This response represents, in our view, an example of the personal experience of Church that the Plenary is seeking. Accordingly, we set it out:

"I attended mass last Sunday, at which we were invited to submit feedback on the notes of the discussion from the Plenary 2020 meetings.

I have read those notes and would like to provide some feedback. There was nothing in particular that I disagreed with, but I would like to highlight the matters that I strongly agree with:

- the Church should consider the abolition of compulsory celibacy for priests, as well as the ordination of women.

- current teachings and emphasis on sexual morality and sinfulness are impediments to church relevance, credibility and connecting with the people of God.

- the Church should specifically welcome divorced and re-married Catholics, LGBTIQ, women and the marginalised. We need their forgiveness for all the wrongs done to them by Church teaching and behaviour.

- women should be equally represented at all levels of the Church, including Church and Diocese staff, the Diaconate and the Priesthood.

I was under the impression that the Church had already signed onto the National Redress Scheme?

I do not think that these are particularly contentious matters, although I appreciate that they may seem that way for an institution as old and committed to its traditions as the Catholic Church. There are still parts of the community where the equal representation of women, for example, remains difficult to countenance. I do not see why the Church cannot be the leader on issues of this kind.

I spent many years separated from the Church, and started attending mass regularly again only about six months ago. The reason I left was because I witnessed a priest punishing the congregation for the small and honest mistake of one member (no homily was given because a mobile phone was accidentally not turned onto silent). It was compounded by reservations I had about participating in a faith that I felt denigrated the contribution of women (generally, and specifically within the church), and denied humanity as it was - only prepared to accept humanity as it wanted it to be.

I'm no theologian by any stretch, I appreciate that I may well have been mis-informed, but I wanted to be honest about the reasons for my decision at the time.

On returning to the church, I was apprehensive about whether it would still reflect those things that bothered me in the past. A few months in, there was a discussion in the media regarding discrimination in employment matters with respect to LGBTIQ individuals. Fr Bullen stated that this Church welcomed all - including the LGBTIQ community - welcome to attend Church, to attend Catholic schools etc. It felt like it came from the heart, and afterwards the congregation applauded. It brought tears to my eyes, and was the first time I felt that the Church and I were ad idem on a potentially contentious matter.

I think that the notes for the Plenary 2020 represented something really positive for the faith. I hope that they are implemented, and I applaud the Church on its transparency and true collaboration on the future of the Catholic faith in this country."

RESPONSE THREE

This response drew attention to an issue which was raised at the Meeting and was overlooked in the Draft Submission. In short, it was the "Peace" issue, particularly, the call for us to love our enemies. The response, in relevant parts, stated.

"One issue which am concerned is missing is that of peace/war/nonviolence especially in the light of the church's silence on the issues and the escalation of military spending over the last few years. The church's silence was particularly noticeable this time last year when the government announced its aspiration for Australia to become one of the ten biggest manufacturers and exporters of military equipment.

Jesus specifically rejected violence, most poignantly when he told Peter to 'put down the sword' as he was about to be arrested. His teaching was focused on the centrality of love. At the plenary meeting our small group discussed these things and in my brief report back to the larger group I mentioned Jesus key teachings: Love of God, love of neighbour and self, and the most challenging love of enemies. We too rarely hear this love of enemies mentioned by church leaders. It's a hard teaching and thus deserves greater focus and emphasis as being central to the Christian message. It requires serious discernment and leadership from our church.

*See the attached Parish Profile 2019 for more about the Parish of Our Lady of the Way North Sydney

*Lord Jesus, teach me to be generous;
teach me to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labor and not to seek reward,
except that of knowing that I do your will.*

Amen.

St. Ignatius Loyola