

Note: The following text is only a DRAFT. If you have any comments,
please email plenary@cq.org.au

PLENARY COUNCIL DRAFT SUBMISSION OF THOSE WHO ATTENDED LISTENING AND DIALOGUE SESSIONS CONDUCTED BY CENTRAL DEANERY OF ARCHDIOCESE IN JUNE 2018

The four listening and dialogue sessions conducted by the Central Deanery of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn on 19 and 21 June 2018 were attended by nearly 300 people.

The sessions started with those present considering the question “What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?”

While all of those present responded differently, or with different emphases, to that question, the response in general terms may be summarised as “God is asking us to explore ways to reinvigorate in the Australian Church the sharing of the Gospel message”.

In the discussions, particular matters which individuals considered the Plenary Council should consider are set out in the attachment to this submission. Some of those matters had a greater level of support than others.

[Plenary Council submission template limits the response to 500 words but permits extra material to be set out in an attachment. The below text is the proposed attachment.]

ATTACHMENT

MATTERS THE PLENARY COUNCIL SHOULD CONSIDER

1. Focus on what was encapsulated in Vatican II, ie, the dignity, vocation, role and responsibility of laity, and work towards being a true synodal church, with unity in diversity and structures to reflect a synodal church. Forming and empowering parish and diocesan pastoral councils should be part of this. Canon 514 (which heavily emphasises the bishop’s role in diocesan pastoral councils) should be reviewed.
2. Focus on developing a more inclusive church. God’s love is inclusive. The church has spent too much time excluding rather than including, eg, women, LGBT people, the divorced, people of other religions. Except in remote dioceses, the church fails to engage with indigenous people. Many people who have drifted away from the church feel intimidated to return by past traditions of the church.
3. The church taking deliberate steps to be more visible in the community and the media, not afraid to be providing answers to the big questions about life and death and spreading the Christian messages of salvation, forgiveness and compassion.
4. Reinvigoration of parish life so that the parish is an inviting place for everyone, reflecting God’s love: children, young families, the elderly, across ethnic, gender and economic lines. With the move to larger parishes, smaller communities within parishes need to be promoted, as in the early church, communities of faith which can reach out to the wider

community. People yearn to belong to caring communities. Home masses and community prayer should be encouraged. Family groups should be reintroduced.

5. Whether the top-down structure of the church is right for today and whether more authority should be delegated (principle of subsidiarity). There should be greater emphasis on the role of priest as pastor, with administration to be carried more prominently by the laity. Each diocese should be required to have a Human Relations plan, based on the sacraments and pastoral care services.
6. Re-introduction of the third rite of reconciliation.
7. Taking steps to change the culture of clericalism in the church. The clergy must be required to undertake ongoing training.
8. Instituting greater openness in the process for appointment of bishops.
9. Taking steps to ensure that women are involved in key decision making roles in the church. Women deacons and women chaplains should be considered.
10. The ordination of married priests.
11. Greater focus on youth. Providing regular platforms for participation of youth in the church. The liturgy, including its language and music, should be reinvigorated to make it more welcoming for youth. There should be more talking with youth, not talking at them. In giving their homilies, priests need to be able to talk with children. Mechanisms should be explored to ensure the church is accessible to youth on line, in schools, at sporting events. The church needs to make more use of digital technology, promote peer to peer youth ministry and promote youth retreats and conferences so the young can meet God in their hearts. Church groups, eg, St Vincent de Paul Society, need to be made more welcoming to youth participation.
12. Supporting authentic, faith-filled teachers in schools. There needs to be greater emphasis in schools on teaching the tenets and framework of the faith.
13. A more active social justice stance from the church, more dialogue from the pulpit, more promotion of involvement by the laity in social justice matters. Church leaders should embrace and promote "Laudate Si", recognising its emphasis on the need to combat climate change as a fundamental social justice issue.
14. Ecumenism needs to be reinvigorated. Leaders of other Christian churches should be invited to provide advice to the Plenary Council, especially on matters of church governance. There should be an ecumenism commission in every diocese charged with responsibility for embracing dialogue with people of other faiths.
15. Using the recommendations of the Royal Commission as a learning and teaching mechanism to show leadership to the world. All recommendations of the Commission relevant to the Catholic Church need to be responded to. Each parish should be asked to consider making an apology to victims of abuse and their families, with a symbol of contrition, eg, memorial plaque, planting a tree. Bishops must not delay any longer the release of the TJHC report.
16. The Plenary Council itself needs urgent consideration so that its purpose is properly articulated, its membership is understood and the role of the laity is properly explained. There is a sense in which people believe that the laity will not really be involved in meaningful decision making in the Plenary Council and will have merely a focus group role. The whole process is too long because many issues need urgent attention now. A woman should be appointed co-chair of the Plenary Council or, if this is not possible under Canon Law, a woman should be appointed deputy chair.