

MEDIA RELEASE
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PLENARY MEMBERS PRESENT FINAL REPORTS OF FIRST ASSEMBLY

An impassioned call for “a prayer for the future of our common home, a Gospel for the home of our future generations” was made during the final reporting back on small group discernment by Plenary Council members today.

The presenters’ comprehensive reports on the 16 agenda questions included proposals and requests for further investigation and research to create a more missionary, Christ-centred Church in Australia.

In presenting her group’s proposals, Catherine McAleer was emotional as she concluded her summary of the question on responding to the call to ecological conversion.

She said the group sought acknowledgement of the “primacy of ecological conversion; personal and communal” and asked for the “explicit adoption” of the Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’ Action Plan* as the vehicle for that conversion to a Church openly committed to God’s creation.

Shaun De Zylva said his group discussed ways of creating a culture of conversion for renewal and mission through truth-telling, story-telling and proclaiming the Gospel for renewal through personal and communal conversion.

Specific proposals included parishes establishing small groups that meet for an annual synod and that each diocese should have a synod at least once every three years; studying and learning from the synodal journey that resulted in the *Uluru Statement of the Heart*, encouraging small ecclesial communities (home/family groups) with learnings from the early Church; and establishing forums for open dialogue and discernment especially with those groups who feel excluded in the Church.

Sabrina-Ann Stevens reiterated the need to determine an appropriate process to support the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and said her group believed a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution was “important for our nation”.

Her group also recommended that the gifts of First Nations Catholics be fully embraced through the inclusion of Indigenous leaders as partners in decision-making at every level of Church - parishes, dioceses, Catholic education, organisations and agencies.

“There is a need to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities - and the parishes, schools and agencies that engage with them - with appropriate resources to enable their full participation in Church and society,” she added.

Fr Trevor Trotter told the assembly there was some discussion in his group about the full understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist as the Real Presence of Christ - Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity - being in a state of decline in Australia.

“We acknowledge that one of the challenges that we face is how we might better welcome God’s people to the Eucharist and assist them to understand what this sacrament offers, entails and asks of those who receive it,” he said.

“Recognising that fewer people today participate in the sacramental life of the Church than in previous times, the question of how best to provide formation on the sacraments arises. Such formation will need to focus on both deepening people’s faith and increasing their knowledge.”

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Considering how to better embrace the diverse liturgical traditions of the Churches which make up the Catholic Church and the cultural gifts of immigrant communities, Theresa Simon stressed that her group did not support the use of the term “immigrant communities” because it did not capture the “fullness of what we are trying to describe”.

The group also recognised the need for a more organised and coordinated approach, at a national level, to the inclusion of the Eastern Churches, rites of the Latin Church and culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the Catholic Church in Australia.

“We must not do this simply for the satisfaction of those Churches and communities, but rather for the richness and gifts that diversity brings to the entire Church,” she said.

“We must do more than acknowledge diversity. Rather, we must enshrine diversity in all we do, in particular when it comes to breathing with an Eastern and Western lung.”

Br Peter Carroll gave a detailed report on his group’s discernment on formation for mission leadership, with several specific ideas to achieve this.

It started from an understanding that “the mission of the Church is the mission of Jesus, which is to make the Reign of God a reality; to incarnate it in our place and time”.

On ordained ministry, Brigid Cooney said her group suggested identifying elements in the current formation of seminarians that are positive and valuable, but also elements that are problematic and can produce ordained ministers that are not living in ways that draw people to Christ.

One proposal was for a research project into international models of seminary pre-ordination formation programs and lifelong formation that have had proven and demonstrated successful outcomes that could be adapted for the Church in Australia.

“Of particular interest are formation programs that are grounded in the community, provide meaningful extended exposure to parish life, programs that support solid intellectual, human, pastoral and spiritual formation,” she said.

Her group believed promoting vocations was a task for all members of the Church and that a renewed focus on vocations could be assisted by a Year of Prayer for Vocations.

Members also recognised a need for opportunities in ministry for single, lay Catholics, “a genuine lay apostolate that fosters community, which is different from young adult or family ministry”.

Dr Mark Copland spoke about his group’s discussion on governance leading to more effective proclamation of the Gospel, which led to two specific proposals.

The first related to canons 127 and 129 in the *Code of Canon Law*, particularly regarding the inclusion of the concept of consensus in legislation. The second recommended that councils, for example finance and pastoral councils, particularly at the parish level, be given a deliberative vote rather than a consultative vote on all matters.

The group recognised that lay people already exercise this power in some contexts, but suggested this could be improved through legislation.

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“While civil society thinks of governance in terms of power, the root of governance, in the Catholic understanding, is service rather than power,” he said.

“Christ washes the feet of his apostles before he gives us the ultimate gift of love. If we work in the spirit of synodality, love must come before power.”

Virginia Bourke said her group proposed using the governance report *The Light from the Southern Cross* and responses to this report from various groups to develop a governance framework that would be adopted by the Plenary Council in the second assembly.

Danielle Fairthorne said her group engaged in rich discussion about the convergences appearing throughout the week on the topic of Catholic education. The three themes emerging were mission, witness and encounter.

“It is clear that the team believes a working group needs to be established to respond to the themes above through a clear roadmap,” she said.

Similarly, Claire Victory said members of her group looking at Catholic agencies expressed an interest in continuing the process of developing concrete proposals over the next nine months.

Recommendations to date included ensuring leaders of key agencies connect more frequently with leaders within the dioceses, allowing for shared leadership for a shared mission, and listening to different voices, including those who feel excluded.

She said welfare agencies, underpinned by Catholic Social Teaching, are often the public face of the Church.

Today’s livestreamed session can be found [here](#).

Find out more about the Plenary Council at www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au