

POSSIBLE NEEDS OF AUSTRALIAN DIOCESES – SOME EXAMPLES

The following notes on the needs of Australian dioceses are included with the survey only to prompt reflection and to assist in thinking about diocesan needs. The notes have been extracted mainly from a presentation to Spirituality in the Pub entitled 'Choosing the next Archbishop of Melbourne', by Dr Peter Wilkinson on 1 June 2016. Included are some views from Pope Francis.

NEEDS OF THE DIOCESE

Church leadership and governance - embracing and implementing the highest standards of good governance in the archdiocese:

- bringing full gender balance into all diocesan structures, organisations and agencies;
- implementing co-responsible decision-making at all levels;
- ensuring full accountability to the faithful of the archdiocese;
- conducting church affairs with maximum transparency;
- fully engaging with the **sensus fidelium** (the sense of faith of the faithful), so that all the faithful of the archdiocese can become involved in a 'communal search' for a shared diocesan vision of goals and methods of evangelization;
- holding a **Diocesan Synod**, (synods or other assemblies can bring together the priests, religious and laity to express their views on matters proposed by the bishop and important to the local church) as soon as possible to prepare for the National Plenary Council proposed for 2020,
- a **Diocesan Pastoral Council** as provided in Canon Law, a key diocesan consultative body on pastoral matters. It could be composed of clergy, religious, and lay persons (male and female), representing all the regions of the archdiocese, its various social conditions, professions and apostolates, and would make pastoral recommendations.
- developing a **Diocesan Pastoral Plan** (DPPs address future needs: Pope John Paul II told bishops that they 'must plan the stages of the journey ahead with all sectors of God's people') - to seek strategies to address some of the **issues in the diocese and the Church**, such as:

Crisis in parish ministry in terms of:

- the lack of vocations to the priesthood and religious life;
- the stop-gap recruiting of priests and seminarians from overseas churches;
- the continuing 'drifting away' of Catholics, especially the young.

Better 'gender balance' in all church bodies and leadership roles.

Child sexual abuse - dealing in a Christlike way with the impacts of child sexual abuse crimes, the episcopal cover-up, and the failure to treat the survivors and their families with pastoral care and justice. This could involve bishops:

- seeking reforms to institutional Church governance locally and universally, repudiating and ridding the Church of all vestiges of clericalism, a major factor in the abuse scandal.

- ensuring accountability, transparency and inclusiveness (beyond asking forgiveness of the survivors and their families, doing public penance, and making just reparation);
- continuing to accept with humility and gratitude the work and recommendations of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry and the Royal Commission;
- providing pastoral care for affected families.

DESIRABLE ATTRIBUTES OF A BISHOP IN CHARGE OF A DIOCESE

A bishop should be a leader who engages with and listens to the faithful, the priests and people of the diocese. **Pope Francis** has said that he will be looking for the following traits:

- a pastor, close to the people, a father and brother,
- someone with great gentleness, . . . not the psychology of a prince,
- able to support the movements of God among his people'
- 'a shepherd with the smell of the sheep'.

Pope Francis has also said that he wants bishops who will:

- foster a 'missionary communion',
- who at times, will 'go before their people' pointing the way',
- at other times 'simply be in their midst with an unassuming and merciful presence',
- at other times 'walking after their people and helping those who lag behind'.

Above all, Pope Francis wants bishops who will:

- 'allow the flock to strike out on new paths',
- 'foster a dynamic, open and missionary communion', and
- 'encourage and develop a pastoral dialogue, with a diocesan synod and a diocesan pastoral council ...out of a desire to listen to everyone, and not simply to those who would tell them what they would like to hear'.

He wants bishops whose 'principal aim with these participatory processes is a missionary desire to reach everyone'.

From Evangelii Gaudium (n.27):

"An ecclesial renewal that cannot be deferred.

I dream of a 'missionary option', that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of to-day's world rather than for her self-preservation."

He goes on to say "The renewal structures demanded by conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire pastoral workers with a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with him."