**Plenary Council: Priority Issues identified in Diocesan Reports**

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1. **Listening & Dialogue Phase.** In May 2018 the ACBC invited Catholics – and others – nationwide to respond to the Question: *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?*

It was a novel approach, asking the faithful to read the ‘signs of times’, discern, dialogue, and respond. Its AIM was “to listen to the voice of God speaking through the voices of the people and to gain a sense of their faith (*sensus fidei*)”.

1. **Written submissions.** By March 2019, 222,000 persons had responded to the question in 17,547 written submissions: 12,758 individual and 4,699 group. Individual respondents were predominantly female (49% to 29% male); predominantly Australian-born (65%); predominantly Catholic (72%); and among Catholics, 75% attended Mass regularly (the 25% who did not still had enough interest in Church to respond). There were few Aboriginal respondents (143), 3% other Christians, and 1% other faiths. Group respondents appeared to be overwhelmingly Catholic. If some 200,000 of the Catholics respondents attended Mass regularly, this would mean that around 1 in 3 of all regular Mass attenders (623,356 in 2016) had responded, a credible representation of the *sensus fidei fidelium*.
2. **Analysis of submissions.** By July 2019 the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) had identified 119 different themes in the 17,547 submissions, and summarised each one in its *Final Report* (chapters 4-10). These themes were the foundation for the 6 National Themes of Discernment and the Listening & Discernment Phase. But the *Final Report* gave no weighting or ranking to the 119 themes.
3. ***Diocesan Reports.*** During March 2020 the NCPR published 28 *Diocesan Reports* in which it analysed both the respondents in each territorial diocese and the content of their submissions. The analysis focused on only 77 (of the 119) ‘most prominent’ themes/issues in the submissions and arranged them into 6 Topic Areas: Love God & Neighbour (11 themes/issues); Leadership & Church Governance (14 issues); Sacraments (8); Mass & Eucharist (9); Social Justice & Environment (9); Outreach & Other (26). The analysis listed and ranked the themes/issues according to ‘most widely discussed’ within each diocese and across dioceses.
4. **Most widely discussed themes/issues.** In April 2020 I undertook **f**urther analysis of the diocesan data and was able to identify the themes/issues prioritised by respondents within each diocese and across dioceses. It was evident that the respondents in many dioceses did NOT widely discuss all Topic Areas and all the themes/issues in them.
5. **Most widely discussed across dioceses.** Only 17 themes/issues were widely discussed in 20 or more dioceses. Only one theme/issue was widely discussed in all 28 dioceses: ‘Greater inclusion for all’. Another 6 were widely discussed in 25-27 dioceses: ‘Greater involvement of laity’, ‘Remaining faithful to Church teaching’, Greater role for women’, ‘Ending compulsory celibacy & allowing priests to marry’, ‘Ordination of women’, and ‘Care for neighbour’.
6. **Most widely discussed ‘within’ dioceses**. It was also possible to identify and give a ranking to the themes/issues within each diocese according to the degree of discussion: from # 1 (most widely discussed) to #6+ (less widely discussed). Only 4 themes/issues were the # 1 most widely discussed within 15 or more dioceses: ‘Greater inclusion for all’ (in 27 dioceses); ‘Greater role for women’ (21 dioceses); ‘Fighting for human rights issues’ (18 dioceses); and ‘Ending compulsory celibacy & allowing priests to marry’ (15 dioceses)***.***

It should be noted that the themes/issues on women in ministry and governance are among the most prominent and most widely discussed across dioceses and within dioceses.

Below is a table which shows the ranking of the topics and themes most widely discussed across the dioceses and within the dioceses. The total number of territorial dioceses in Australia, and for which a separate diocesan report was published, is 28.

**THEMES/ISSUES MOST WIDELY DISCUSSED WITHIN AND ACROSS DIOCESES**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic Areas and Themes/Issues discussed** | **Ranking of theme/issue within individual dioceses** | | | | | | **Total Dioceses** |
|  | **# 1** | **# 2** | **# 3** | **# 4** | **# 5** | **# 6+** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **A. Love God, Love Neighbour** | 24 | 4 |  |  |  |  | 28 |
| **E. Social Justice and Environment** | 3 | 7 | 5 | 9 | 4 |  | 28 |
| Greater inclusion of all | 27 | 1 |  |  |  |  | 28 |
| **F. Outreach & Other** |  |  |  |  |  |  | 28 |
| **B. Leadership and Church Governance** | 2 | 10 | 5 | 8 | 2 |  | 27 |
| Greater involvement of Laity | 2 | 6 | 9 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 27 |
| **C. Sacraments** |  | 6 | 17 | 3 | 1 |  | 27 |
| Remaining faithful to Church teaching | 3 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 26 |
| Greater role for women | 21 | 3 | 1 | 1 |  |  | 26 |
| Ending celibacy /allowing priests to marry | 15 | 9 | 2 |  |  |  | 26 |
| Ordination of women | 2 | 14 | 9 | 1 |  |  | 26 |
| Care for neighbour | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 25 |
| Greater trust, faith and hope in God | 6 | 7 | 5 | 3 |  | 3 | 24 |
| Greater focus on Jesus Christ | 12 | 6 | 5 | 1 |  |  | 24 |
| Better faith formation | 1 | 7 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 24 |
| Fighting for human rights issues | 18 | 5 |  |  |  |  | 23 |
| Outreach to youth | 11 | 6 | 3 | 2 |  | 1 | 23 |
| Sharing faith with others | 7 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 23 |
| Greater focus on Word of God |  |  | 4 | 6 | 3 | 9 | 22 |
| Greater leadership from bishops |  | 4 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 21 |
| Greater emphasis on prayer & sacraments | 9 | 8 | 3 | 1 |  |  | 21 |
| Care for the environment | 1 | 2 | 13 | 3 | 1 |  | 20 |
| New leadership and governance model |  | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 19 |
| Ending clericalism | 3 |  | 4 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 18 |
| Greater leadership from priests |  |  | 2 | 3 | 1 | 12 | 18 |
| Modernise church teachings (generally) | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 18 |
| Teaching authentic Catholic faith | 1 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 17 |
| Being a witness in Society | 1 |  | 1 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 15 |
| New model of Church, diocese & parish | 1 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 15 |
| Ending LGBITQ discrimination |  | 3 | 6 | 5 | 1 |  | 15 |
| CSA - more transparency & accountability | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 15 |
| Renewed call to holiness |  |  |  |  | 1 | 12 | 13 |
| Inclusion of divorced & remarried | 4 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 13 |
| Listening to each other more |  | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 12 |
| Stronger parish communities | 2 | 1 |  | 1 | 4 | 4 | 12 |
| Better selection & formation for priests |  | 1 |  | 1 | 1 | 7 | 10 |
| Restoring 3rd rite of Reconciliation |  |  | 4 | 4 |  |  | 8 |
| Praying the Rosary (emphasis) | 5 |  | 3 |  |  |  | 8 |
| More welcoming parishes |  | 1 |  | 4 |  | 3 | 8 |
| Different translation of Mass /inclusive language | 1 | 2 |  |  |  | 4 | 7 |
| Keeping the faith |  |  |  |  | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| **D. Mass & Eucharist** |  | 1 |  | 4 | 1 |  | 6 |
| Putting Gospel values in action | 1 |  |  | 2 | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| Outreach to wider community |  |  | 1 |  |  | 5 | 6 |
| More support for priests |  |  |  |  | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| Make Mass appealing to youth & children | 2 |  |  | 1 |  | 2 | 5 |
| Care for family (evangelisation of) |  |  | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Greater connection with & inclusion of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders | 1 |  | 2 | 1 |  | 1 | 5 |
| Focus on ecumenism |  | 2 |  |  | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| CSA - Greater concern for victims & survivors | 1 |  |  | 1 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| Emphasis on Church teachings on marriage | 2 |  | 1 |  | 1 |  | 4 |
| Better attention to all aspects of liturgy/cultural Mass | 1 |  | 2 | 1 |  |  | 4 |
| CSA - Call for repentance |  |  |  |  | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Listening to the Laity |  |  |  |  | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Better teachers in Catholic schools | 1 |  |  |  | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Working together in unity |  |  |  |  |  | 3 | 3 |
| Overseas priests - concerns |  |  |  | 1 | 2 |  | 3 |
| Eucharistic adoration |  |  | 1 |  | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| New order - inverted pyramid |  |  |  | 1 |  | 2 | 3 |
| More involvement of youth |  |  | 1 |  |  | 1 | 2 |
| Becoming a Vatican II Church |  |  |  |  | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Better preparation & support for married couples | 1 |  | 1 |  |  |  | 2 |
| Ordaining married men to priesthood |  |  |  | 2 |  |  | 2 |
| Greater attention to music |  | 1 | 1 |  |  |  | 2 |
| Focus on mission/being missionary disciples |  |  |  |  |  | 2 | 2 |
| Positive church public relations |  |  |  |  | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Keeping the commandments |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 1 |
| Women deacons (emphasis) |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 1 |
| Servant leadership |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 1 |
| Annulment process - too hard |  |  | 1 |  |  |  | 1 |
| Communion for all |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 1 |
| Better homilies |  |  |  |  | 1 |  | 1 |
| Greater inclusion for people with disabilities (emphasis) | 1 |  |  |  |  |  | 1 |
| Reducing margins between rich and poor |  |  |  |  | 1 |  | 1 |
| Living in peace and harmony |  |  |  | 1 |  |  | 1 |
| Outreach to all baptised |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 1 |
| Modernise church teachings (liturgy & sacraments emphasis) | 1 |  |  |  |  |  | 1 |
| Formation of small Christian communities |  |  | 1 |  |  |  | 1 |
| Special care of rural parishes |  |  |  | 1 |  |  | 1 |
| More youth programs |  |  |  | 1 |  |  | 1 |
| Listening to the Holy Spirit |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 1 |
| Supporting same-sex marriage |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 1 |
| Better implementation of Royal Commission recommendations |  |  | 1 |  |  |  | 1 |
|  | **#1** | **#2** | **#3** | **#4** | **#5** | **#6+** |  |
|  | **Ranking of theme/issue within individual dioceses** | | | | | | **Total**  **Dioceses** |

Sources: NCPR, ACBC, [*Listen to what the Spirit is saying. Final Report for the Plenary Council Phase 1: Listening and Dialogue*](https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/reports/), Canberra, ACT, July 2019; NCPR, ACBC, [*Diocesan Reports on Phase 1: Listening and Dialogue*](https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/reports/), Canberra, ACT, March 2020. Table and layout prepared by Peter J Wilkinson, June 2020

1. **Writing and Discernment Papers**. At Pentecost 2020 the ACBC released the 6 documents prepared by the Writing & Discernment Groups on the National Themes of Discernment. The is no clear evidence in the papers that the authors were fully aware of the priority issues as set out above.

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