



FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

RECONCILIATION: HEALING WOUNDS, RECEIVING GIFTS

All Australians have much to learn from the cultures, spirituality, and knowledge of country of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, our society is yet to recognise fully Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the traditional owners and custodians of the lands and waters now known as Australia, or to achieve right relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

The Catholic Church in Australia has been caught up in this history of dispossession, Stolen Generations, racism, and the undermining of language and culture. Dioceses, eparchies, and religious institutes have made sincere efforts to share faith, education, and pastoral services with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, much suffering has been inflicted by the historically misguided attempts of those who were ignorant of the cultural richness of these peoples.

We know that we will not be ‘fully the Church that Jesus wants’ us to be until Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have made their contribution to the life of the Church and “until that contribution has been joyfully received by others” within the Church.

The Plenary Council joyfully receives the following recommendations of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC), which were submitted “in the hope that the Catholic Church in Australia will more resemble the Church that Jesus Christ wants her to be in relation to Australia’s First Peoples” (John Paul II, Address to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, 29 November 1986):

- a. Developing the cross-cultural competency of clergy, religious, lay workers and volunteers in the Catholic Church to enable more effective and appropriate ministry with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- b. NATSICC calls upon the Catholic Church to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics to undertake formation and training. Further, the Church is encouraged to ensure that existing retreats and courses are culturally appropriate.
- c. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality contains symbols and rituals that, when used appropriately in Catholic liturgical contexts, enrich our celebrations, and facilitate a welcoming environment for Indigenous Peoples.

- d. NATSICC recommends that the traditional custodians of the land on which the Church, school, parish, or organisation stands be acknowledged in a prominent and appropriate manner. Verbal acknowledgement prior to meetings and Mass is also encouraged.
- e. NATSICC calls upon the Catholic Church to unearth and discover the genius and gifts that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people possess through inclusion on committees, boards, and decision-making bodies.

The Fifth Plenary Council:

- a. says sorry to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in and beyond the Church for the part played by the Church in the harms they have suffered;
- b. commits to walk with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in continuing to work towards recognition, reconciliation and justice;
- c. joyfully receives and accepts the recommendations contained in the NATSICC position paper “Embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Life of the Catholic Church”;
- d. endorses the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and encourages engagement with processes for implementing the statement, including local, regional, and national truth-telling efforts.

FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
RECONCILIATION: HEALING WOUNDS, RECEIVING GIFTS
DECREE

The Fifth Plenary Council of Australia decrees:

Article 1

That each Catholic school, parish, diocese, eparchy or organisation will respond to the recommendations contained in the NATSICC position paper, “Embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Life of the Catholic Church” in the following ways:

- a. acknowledges in a prominent and appropriate manner the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which their buildings stand;
- b. includes the online Cultural Competency in a Catholic Context course developed by NATSICC and approved by the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the orientation and/or ongoing formation of staff and volunteers to enable more effective and appropriate ministry;
- c. ensures that any retreats and other formation activities offered are culturally appropriate;
- d. works actively to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on its committees, boards and decision-making bodies.

Article 2

That the advisory councils of the Bishops’ Commission for Liturgy, in partnership with NATSICC, will develop options for the liturgically and culturally appropriate use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander symbols and rituals in Catholic liturgical contexts, with respect for the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

The Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia will interpret the decrees of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia in accordance with the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches and the traditions of each church *sui iuris*.

In accordance with canon 446 of the Code of Canon Law, this decree is not to be promulgated until it has been reviewed by the Apostolic See. It will be promulgated in *Australasian Catholic Record* and the website of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in accordance with its usual practice. The decrees will oblige six months after promulgation.

Signed:

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB
President

Bishop Shane Mackinlay
Vice-President

Date:



FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

CHOOSING REPENTANCE – SEEKING HEALING

1. As the Plenary Council of the Church in Australia, we express our profound sorrow that children and young people and vulnerable adults have been abused by clergy, religious and lay workers of the Catholic Church, and that religious leaders have failed to act sufficiently to prevent or respond to abuse. To the victims and survivors of abuse, their families, and communities, we offer our unreserved apology. We commit to doing whatever we can to promote healing for those so gravely harmed and to make the Church a truly safe place for everyone (Cf. Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia's Response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 31 August 2018).
2. The Church has taken significant steps in recent decades to respond to those who have suffered the trauma of abuse. These steps have included the national Towards Healing protocol and the Melbourne Response. Dioceses and other Church organisations have introduced policies and procedures to ensure that good practice in professional standards and safeguarding is observed by all who exercise ministry in the Church. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse highlighted the extent of abuse in the Church and in our society as a whole. The Royal Commission also made recommendations about what should be done to ensure justice and compassion for those who have been abused and to create a safer Church and a safer society. The Church's annual reports to the National Office for Child Safety provide an account of how Church organisations are implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission. Some Church communities have set up memorials in various forms, as a tangible recognition of the harm done through abuse and the need for special care for children. Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd, as well as regional and local initiatives, have an ongoing role in promoting the protection of children and adults at risk.
3. In responding to the call to become a more Christ-centred Church, the members of the Plenary Council reflected on the special care that Christ showed to children, welcoming them and blessing them (Matthew 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–15). We are keenly aware of the cases in which the Church has failed to follow Christ's example of such care and we acknowledge the need for repentance.

4. As a Plenary Council, we recommit the Catholic Church in Australia to responding transparently, with justice and compassion, to those who have been abused, whether they approach the Church directly or through the government's National Redress Scheme or through civil litigation. Dioceses and other Church organisations should provide sensitive and appropriate processes for the pastoral care of those who have been abused.

5. For the safeguarding of children and adults at risk, and for the prevention of abuse, we recommit the Catholic Church in Australia to implementing the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards. We endorse the expectation in those standards that each diocese, eparchy and Catholic entity regularly reviews their procedures for keeping children, young people, and vulnerable adults safe, in the light of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, as well as the requirements of canon and civil law.

6. We affirm the practice of an annual Day of Prayer (currently called "Safeguarding Sunday") on which Church communities throughout Australia pray for God's healing for those who have suffered abuse and dedicate themselves to care for children and all those who are vulnerable, following the example of Christ.

7. In this introduction, the Plenary Council:

- a. says sorry to the victims and survivors of abuse, their families and communities;
- b. recommits the Church to respond with justice and compassion to those who have suffered from the trauma of abuse, including where appropriate, ongoing pastoral and spiritual support and accompaniment;
- c. encourages the practice, where appropriate, of local memorials in various forms, as a tangible recognition of the harm done through abuse and the need for special care for children;
- d. reaffirms the commitment of the Church in Australia to the work of implementing and improving safeguarding standards and practices;
- e. calls on all Catholics to commit to ensuring that Church environments are safe and respectful; and
- f. requests the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Catholic Religious Australia and the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons, with assistance from appropriate experts, to study, acknowledge and address systemic factors which have facilitated abuse within the Church.

FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
CHOOSING REPENTANCE – SEEKING HEALING

DECREE

The Fifth Plenary Council of Australia decrees:

Article 1

That to express more fully the aims of the annual “Safeguarding Sunday”, in consultation with those who have been harmed by abuse:

- a. a new name will be adopted for “Safeguarding Sunday”, and
- b. the Bishops Commission for Liturgy will develop appropriate rituals and liturgical resources to be offered to parishes for use on the day.

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FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

CALLED BY CHRIST – SENT FORTH AS MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

1. God's covenant with creation, made new in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, is fashioned, sustained and nourished by the gift of the Holy Spirit, who calls together the community of disciples, the Church, privileged to share in Jesus' mission. The Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ continuously overflows into the work and beauty of creation. In the Incarnation, the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us as the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1:15). Jesus embodies the depths of God's love "so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). This proclamation of the kingdom or reign of God is at the heart of Jesus' mission. The Church exists in and for the world. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, it incarnates Christ's love for the world, just as Christ incarnates God's love for the world. To be Christ-centred missionary disciples requires loving attention to our world, which is marked by both sin and grace, prayerfully reading the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel, seeking to grasp the meaning of things and to discern God's will under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* n. 11).

Shaping Communities Centred on Christ and Sent by the Spirit

2. This call to discipleship is integral to the Gospel. Each of us is called by our Baptism to be a missionary disciple, hearing and responding to God's invitation to follow Jesus Christ with joy (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* n. 120). As a people anointed with the oil of gladness, all the baptised share in Christ's three-fold office that is priestly, prophetic, and royal (*Lumen Gentium* n. 31). In this way, the Church proclaims that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 10:17) and embodies the in-breaking reign of God that transforms human history. In the words of Pope Saint Paul VI, "the Gospel is not out-of-date" but remains an inspiration for offering people of our own time and place renewed hope while also "advancing the life of society" (Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, n. 4). In this way the Church is called to attend with integrity and compassion to the great issues impacting respect for life and its protection at all stages, including the issues of "contraception, abortion, reproductive technologies and euthanasia." The Church is also called to facilitate the inclusion and address the needs of people with disability, the needs of the "frail elderly, refugees, the trafficked and newcomers, those with mental illness," and to work to protect Australians' right to religious belief and practice.

3. In a spirit of transformation and hope the Plenary Council affirms that we need “to move ‘from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry’” (Latin American Bishops, quoted in *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 15). An evangelising community knows that God has taken the initiative; God has loved us first (cf. 1 John 4:19). Therefore, we can move forward, speak and act boldly, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.

4. The *First Assembly Proposals* document encourages “taking the decision to become missionary communities” and suggests pathways for growing as missionary disciples: parish forums; small groups (for example for young people, families, children, married couples, single adults, etc.) and ecclesial communities that may foster the lay apostolate. These pathways provide supportive spaces for prayer, formation, fellowship, and mission animation. The document also proposes research to identify where missionary activity is thriving. Consistent support has been shown for the pursuit of new models of engagement with young people and families, encouraging initiatives in youth ministry, peer support and evangelisation, as well as support for the domestic Church. In *Evangelii Gaudium* (n. 28) Pope Francis describes four key characteristics of an evangelising parish:

- it is “in contact with the homes and the lives of its people”
- it is “an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration”
- it “encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers”
- it is “a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach.”

5. The Plenary Council affirms a culture of synodality for parishes, dioceses and eparchies, where healthy and fruitful relationships between clergy and laity “recognise different but complementary charisms and opportunities for co-responsibility”, and desire “consultative and collaborative approaches to governance at all levels in the Church.” The emphasis on listening and discernment for a synodal Church reveals how the People of God may be more centred on Christ, build healthy and respectful relationships amongst ourselves, and be effective missionary disciples in the Spirit:

... a Church which listens ... realizes that listening is more than simply hearing. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of Truth” (John 14:17) in order to know what he “says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7) (Francis, “Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops”).

6. The Plenary Council commends the contributions of Church ministries and services to society as examples of evangelisation through missionary discipleship. Amidst many challenges, the Church makes a unique contribution to Australian society through its ministries and services, particularly those in health, aged care, disability, community services and education. The long-standing commitment and service of Catholic religious women and men within these sectors is well-recognised and has been extraordinary. In these domains they continue to provide lay people with opportunities for professional formation and participation in leadership. The unique role of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons demonstrates how both ecclesial governance and service to Australian society may operate in a mature,

innovative, and effective way. Catholic ministries often already embody synodal elements that form and support missionary disciples. These include commitment to hospitality, encounter, and dialogue; strong practices of discernment; Christian service and compassion; and the provision of a variety of opportunities for Catholics to deepen their baptismal calling.

Building Relationships of Respect and Compassion

7. The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. Missionary discipleship is participation in Jesus’ own mission; it is characterised by openness to encounter, hospitality and dialogue with each other, other Christians, people of faith and no faith, and with the human family for the care of our common home. Just as we were enlivened by “deep listening” during the Plenary Council Assemblies, we propose formation for all Catholics in the practice of listening, so that we might discover in other people a brother or sister to be supported and loved. (*Fratelli Tutti*, n. 8). Mission directs us to the peripheries of society. It calls us to be in active solidarity with all those who experience disadvantage or exclusion; including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disabilities, people on low incomes, refugees and asylum-seekers, people experiencing mental ill-health and with the exploited earth. Especially important are those who hold a grievance against us (cf. Matthew 5:23), those who experience marginalisation by the Church, and those who are victims of abuse, exclusion, intolerance, and lack of compassion and understanding. There are deep wounds in our brothers and sisters who are excluded in the Church through a lack of mercy by some... The challenge to meet those in pain is to be a Church that is able to dialogue and listen without judgement, to hear the voice of Christ in their stories.

8. Listening has the power to open us to the Spirit’s work of transformation, enabling genuine encounter and giving rise to missionary action. During the First Assembly, as Members of the Plenary Council, we devoted time to thinking of and praying for people who have experienced marginalisation within the Church, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women, those who are divorced, those who identify as LGBTIQ+, and those who have suffered abuse of any form. We express our profound sorrow to those who have been hurt through an encounter with the Church. We call on all members of the Church to make our community one in which all the baptised find welcome and inclusion.

9. The First Assembly Proposals remind us that a synodal journey needs to be inclusive and focus upon ecclesial participation, communion, and mission. As Jesus demonstrates, our language should never be “judgemental, demeaning, and hurtful.” Instead:

Jesus clears a way to seeing two faces, that of the Father and that of our brother. He does not give us two more formulas or two more commands. He gives us two faces, or better yet, one alone: the face of God reflected in so many other faces. For in every one of our brothers and sisters, especially the least, the most vulnerable, the defenceless and those in need, God’s very image is found. Indeed, with the scraps of this frail humanity, the Lord will shape his final work of art. For “what endures, what has value in life, what riches do not disappear? Surely these two: the Lord and our neighbour. These two riches do not disappear!” (*Gaudete et Exsultate* n. 61.)

Seeking Communion

10. In his address to the members of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1987, Pope Saint John Paul II declared: “Just as interreligious dialogue is one element in the mission of the Church, the proclamation of God’s saving work in our Lord Jesus Christ is another... There can be no question of choosing one and ignoring or rejecting the other.” In this spirit of mission, dioceses, eparchies, and parishes are to commit to building friendly and co-operative relationships with other Christians, communities of other religious traditions and people with no religion, and to promote and engage in the four forms of interreligious dialogue: dialogues of life, action, theological exchange, and religious experience (Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, n. 42).

11. **THEREFORE**, this Plenary Council commits the Church in Australia to being centred on Christ, with a baptismal identity and on a path of missionary discipleship. This commitment involves:

- a. development of resources, formation and education programs in the promotion of hospitality, encounter, dialogue and merciful responses to the needs of our society;
- b. Church communities and entities promoting evangelisation through hospitality, encounter, dialogue, and merciful responses. Informed by encounter with people and communities who are disadvantaged or marginalised, and drawing on Catholic Social Teaching, they seek to foster a more just and compassionate society. This endeavour includes meaningful analysis and challenging of systems that perpetuate disadvantage and inequality;
- c. all Church communities, entities and collaborative bodies developing a culture of inclusion in their structures and policies that demonstrate commitment to collaboration and co-responsibility, in ways that are discerned as being appropriate and achievable;
- d. taking care to provide opportunities for those formed for leadership in the Church, including seminarians, to engage in dialogue with people who experience disadvantage or exclusion, both in the Church and in society.
- e. dioceses and eparchies supporting Parish Pastoral Councils to establish opportunities to listen to people on the peripheries – within and beyond parishes – and to develop plans to overcome experiences of exclusion, lack of acceptance and other boundaries. Diocesan Pastoral Councils will explore how to provide Parish leaders with formation and resources for training in these works of evangelisation; and
- f. development of a long-term plan to evangelise the community and catechise the faithful through dialogue within the Church and the wider community on areas including: the sanctity of all life, the nature of the human person, sexuality, marriage and family; better support for healthy marital and sexual lives; proclamation of the Gospel through engagement in the public arena and

contribution to public debate on issues relating to marriage, sexuality, and social and ecological justice.

FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

CALLED BY CHRIST – SENT FORTH AS MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

DECREE

The Plenary Council decrees:

Article 1

That those responsible for Catholic schooling and early childhood education, in consultation with representatives of Catholic parents' groups and parish-based organisation, led by the National Catholic Education Commission and drawing upon the document, *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (2017), establish a national forum, which will seek to:

- a. identify and respond to the needs of the diverse and distinct circumstances of Catholic schools in Australia;
- b. build partnerships which enhance the vision of Catholic education as an instrument of evangelisation and an essential dimension of the contemporary mission of the Church;
- c. offer a process for critical reflection and discernment of the vocation of Catholic education today;
- d. support formation opportunities for catechesis, faith formation, leadership development and religious education pedagogy; and
- e. to assist parish engagement with schools and young people.

Article 2

That the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service establish a triennial National Forum of Catholic social service, health and aged care, disability, prison ministry, refugee and asylum-seeker, and justice, ecology and peace organisations and representatives of those served by these organisations; and that the purpose of this forum include:

- a. providing opportunities for dialogue that will contribute to the ability of the Church in Australia to attend to "examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel";
- b. identifying and exploring priorities for evangelisation through outreach, service provision, advocacy and formation;
- c. addressing gaps;
- d. seeking opportunities for collaboration; and
- e. informing the development of local social teachings to be issued by the Australian Bishops.

Article 3

- a. That each diocese and eparchy identify ways of promoting ecumenical and interfaith relationships (e.g., an Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer) that are practical and appropriate for the diocese or eparchy.
- b. That the Bishops Commission for Christian Unity and Inter-religious Dialogue – in collaboration with Catholic tertiary institutions and theological associations – provide guidance, advice and resources to dioceses and eparchies for ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and relationships, and formation for those responsible for ecumenical and interreligious relations.

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President

Bishop Shane Mackinlay
Vice-President

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FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

WITNESSING TO THE EQUAL DIGNITY OF WOMEN AND MEN

1. God's word speaks clearly of the equal dignity of women and men: "So God created humankind in his image . . . male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). For Christians specifically, "there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). In the Church, all people receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are mediated through our baptism: "There is one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all" (Ephesians 4: 4-6).
2. Scripture calls the Church to recognize the equal dignity of women and men and to esteem their contributions. Throughout history, the Church has looked to Mary the Mother of God as a model for every human person and *the* model for Christian discipleship. At the close of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Saint Paul VI spoke of the "hour of woman," (Paul VI, Address to Women, 8 December 1965) recognizing the unique contribution that women make in the life of society and the Church. This has been true in the history of the Catholic Church in Australia. Mary of the Cross MacKillop, Eileen O'Connor, Mary Glowrey, and Caroline Chisholm are examples of faith-filled women who have made outstanding contributions to society and to Catholic life, often against significant odds.
3. In his *Letter to Women*, Pope Saint John Paul II apologised for harm caused to women, and he called us to ensure the personal dignity and rights of women are protected and upheld as well as recognising the unique gifts they contribute to building up a healthy Church and society. In particular, he called us to work to overcome the cultural assumptions of inequality:

Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. This has prevented women from truly being themselves and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity. Certainly, it is no easy task to assign the blame for this, considering the many kinds of cultural conditioning which down the centuries have shaped ways of thinking and acting. And if objective blame, especially in particular historical contexts, has belonged to not just a few members of the Church, for this I am truly sorry. John Paul (John Paul II, Letter to Women, 29 June 1995, n. 3)
4. From the beginning of the twentieth century, a growing awareness of the equal dignity of women and men has reshaped Australian social and political life. Nonetheless, disregard

for the equal dignity of women and men persists in society and the Church. There is still much to be done.

5. The Plenary Council has heard from women of varied experiences in the Church today. Sometimes women are joyful, happy, and thriving in their service to Christ and the Church. Other times women experience barriers and a lack of support in seeking to offer their gifts in service of the Gospel, which has caused frustration and disappointment. Authentic witness to the equal dignity of women and men requires addressing issues of power, authority, and the freedom of persons to decide and act on their decisions with informed consciences. We need to deepen our understanding of the human person, to appreciate more fully the gifts that women and men together bring to the life of the Church. This will require scriptural and theological formation and catechesis at the parish, diocesan, eparchial, and national levels. Here too, there is much work to be done.

6. In light of the above and aware of the extent of the ongoing challenges, this Plenary Council commits the Church in Australia to acting in ways that witness clearly to the equal dignity of women and men, with their diverse gifts and experiences. It commits the Church to enhancing the role of women in the Church, and to overcoming assumptions, culture, practices and language that lead to inequality.

FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
WITNESSING TO THE EQUAL DIGNITY OF WOMEN AND MEN

DECREE

The Plenary Council decrees:

Article 1

That the Plenary Council commits the Church in Australia to ensuring:

- a. through formal policies and intentional practice, the experiences and perspectives of women, including women who exercise ministry, are heard, considered and valued at local, diocesan and national levels. This is particularly important for matters which affect them distinctively;
- b. that women are appropriately represented in decision-making structures of Church governance at the parish, diocese or eparchy, and national level, and in Church agencies, entities, and organisations;
- c. that dioceses and eparchies recognise and value publicly, and properly remunerate, women who lead and serve in the Church in various ways.

Article 2

That each Australian diocese and eparchy commits to supporting, with appropriate formation and recognition, new opportunities for women to participate in ministries that engage with the most important aspects of diocesan and parish life.

Article 3

That the Plenary Council commits the Church in Australia to implementing more fully the undertakings made by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in their Social Justice Statement, *Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond* (2000), in response to the research report *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus* (1999).

Article 4

That, should the universal law of the Church be modified to authorize the diaconate for women, the Plenary Council recommends that the Australian Bishops examine how best to implement it in the context of the Church in Australia.

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FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

COMMUNION IN GRACE: SACRAMENT TO THE WORLD

1. The Church is “like a sacrament”, a sign and instrument of union with God and the unity of the whole human race. (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964, n. 1) We know that the Church was founded by Christ and that our vocation is to be the sacrament of communion with God and of unity among all people (*Lumen Gentium*, nn. 1, 8). The Church’s receptivity to sacramental grace deepens our spiritual connections with each other, making visible our sacramental nature. The multicultural nature of our Church community has generated a variety of liturgical and spiritual experiences for Catholics in Australia. New ecclesial movements and communities have also helped many faithful to rediscover the beauty of the Christian vocation. The Council hopes that, drawing on the charisms of religious orders and of ecclesial movements, a rich national network might flourish, providing opportunities for Catholics to be enriched by the spiritual and mystical traditions which have nourished the Church through the centuries.

2. “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12). Members of the Church are diverse, and their vocations are complementary. Some are laypeople, some are in consecrated life, and some are ordained as deacon, priest, or bishop. Lay Catholics may be single or married; they may participate in ecclesial movements; they may be connected with religious communities. The Church desires to foster vocations in every aspect of Church life, knowing that disciples can serve Christ’s mission according to their unique gifts. In recent times, the universal Church has broadened criteria for admission to the ministries of Lector and Acolyte. With the recognition of the Ministry of Catechist, we are witnessing a wider range of formal ministry opportunities in the Church. Throughout its phases, the Plenary Council has also heard a call for the renewal of preaching, which is another acknowledgment of the importance of faith formation, rooted in Scripture, for the mission of the Church.

3. Through ordination, priests, who are already baptised disciples, enter into a new relationship with the ecclesial community. Called and consecrated by the Church, through the ministry of the bishop, they are to gather the community, proclaim the Gospel and preside at the liturgy, in order to sanctify the entire community of faith for its mission in the world. As disciples, ordained priests are themselves to be formed by the Word and sacraments they celebrate, so that their discipleship is manifest in their way of life and in their relationships, which are to reflect the Spirit of Jesus, the one who serves.

4. The diversity and unity of the Church are mirrored in the diverse practices of prayer and the ecclesial/liturgical families of the Catholic communion (the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church). These can all help to build up strong communities of faith, to enable the active and effective participation of all the baptised, to create opportunities for ongoing formation in faith and to draw all believers deeper into the mission of the Gospel. In Australia, the Eastern Catholic Churches provide a vibrancy to complement the Western Catholic Church in proclaiming the Christian message. The Eastern Churches are flourishing and have an important ongoing contribution to make to the Catholic Church in Australia and to the wider Australian community. By preserving their ancient liturgical, disciplinary and spiritual traditions, the Eastern Churches offer witness to the diversity in unity which adds to the beauty of Christ's Church. The Eastern Churches, who have a diverse expression of liturgy and spirituality even amongst themselves, have an important and unique contribution to make to mission, formation, liturgy, issues relating to children, young people, women and men, ecumenical and interfaith relations, ecology and conversion.

5. All members of the Church are called to help Christ's Church breathe with both lungs (John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 25 May 1995, n. 54) – East and West – especially in the formation of its teachers; in the religious education curricula of Catholic schools and catechetical materials, including diocesan, independent, religious institute and ministerial public juridic persons' schools; in Catholic universities, and in other institutions of Catholic higher education. Eastern Catholics must always have a place as active participants and leaders in whole Church gatherings. Special care must be taken to include those without an ordinary or diocese of their own rite in Australia.

6. The Plenary Council reaffirms the pre-eminent role of liturgical worship in the life of the Church. As Vatican II teaches, "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the font from which all her power flows." (Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1963, n. 10) Renewal of its celebration is needed to ensure the faithful are properly nourished at the table of the Lord's Word and Sacrament. This will be reflected in the formation of Christian faith and life, and the consequent need for a renewal of how the faith is communicated, both in the celebration of the Eucharist and in other occasions of common prayer. The way that we worship informs how we believe (*lex orandi, lex credendi*). Our communal worship witnesses to unity and hope in a fractured world increasingly hostile to public acknowledgement of God. Through sacramental grace and our experience of worship, the celebration of the sacraments and other rites, powerfully forms us. Worship opens the human heart to ongoing conversion to Christ, for the celebration of the liturgy is "an action of Christ and his body the Church" (*Sacrosanctum concilium*, n. 7) The yearning for such conversion and healing has been evident at each moment of discernment for the Plenary Council.

7. We rejoice when Catholics come to receive the sacraments at key moments in their lives. The Church welcomes these opportunities for accompaniment and dialogue as we celebrate God's role in our individual and communal life. Nonetheless, the discernment process of the Council has highlighted that, in Australia today, sacramental celebrations are sometimes approached more as a cultural milestone than a moment in ongoing faith formation that unites us with Christ and with each other. It can be more a process of certification than incorporation. Parents and caregivers who desire for their children to be baptised often have little ongoing involvement in the life of the parish. The Church needs to attend to this challenge and seek to understand better the reasons behind this lack of engagement. A parish's first response to these approaches must always be to welcome and encourage what is positive in a family's request, warmly inviting them to move further on their journey towards a personal relationship with Christ, lived out in the Christian community. This situation calls for the continued formation of all in a renewed understanding of the centrality of sacramental and parish life. The Church recognises that the ideal model for the formation, preparation and celebration for the sacraments of initiation for children is family-centred and parish-based, drawing on the assistance of Catholic schools and catechists.

8. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults continues to be a source of renewed vitality and new membership for parish communities and the Church as a whole. This journey of initiation, conversion, welcome and acceptance requires considerable community and practical resourcing to celebrate well the various stages of growth and maturing into faith. This can often stretch the capacity of communities, particularly small and isolated ones, to offer a deep and fruitful period of preparation. In addition, and as with children's initiation, parish communities sometimes struggle to maintain contact with neophytes after the celebration of the sacraments of initiation. The experience of welcoming new members into the Church through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults offers communities opportunities to collaborate and share resources with other communities, and to foster commitment to discipleship in those who seek to be initiated into the life of the Church.

9. The Church professes the Eucharist to be the source and summit of all sacramental life (Lumen Gentium, n. 11). Thus, celebration of the Eucharist, and formation for participation in the celebration according to the call for liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council, offers opportunities for spiritual growth. The Plenary Council acknowledges the need for renewal in catechesis, formation, and devotion to this Sacrament. To support this, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has requested that the 2028 International Eucharistic Congress take place in Australia. This would provide a time of prayerful preparation for the People of God. The Plenary Council hopes that dioceses will commit to planning and promoting communal public events that focus on the Eucharist, in service of forming Catholic belief, culture and identity. These might include feast day celebrations, Eucharistic processions and adoration, and the development and performance of music well-suited to worship.

10. The Liturgy of the Word is crucial to the celebration of the Eucharist. According to the Second Vatican Council, “to achieve the restoration, progress and adaptation of the sacred liturgy, it is essential to promote that warm and living love for Scripture to which the venerable tradition of both eastern and western rites give testimony” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 24). Opening up the Word together in prayer, we invite God into our lives. In our listening and discernment, concern has been voiced about the state of preaching in the Church in Australia. Supporting and promoting excellent faithful preaching reflects the importance of the homily in the celebration of the Eucharist: “By means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text, during the course of the liturgical year” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 52).

11. The Plenary Council recognises the importance of the language used in the liturgy. Translations of prayers and Scripture passages for use in the liturgy need to be both faithful to the original text and sensitive to the call for language that communicates clearly and includes all in the assembly.

12. The People of God in Australia have voiced a desire to be formed in the sacrament of reconciliation. Some have advocated for use of the third form of the Rite of Penance, and a wish for more formation in the first and second forms has also been voiced.

13. In a society that sees the Catholic understanding of marriage as “outdated and irrelevant”, there is an urgent and clear need for a renewed catechesis on marriage. At the same time, there is a great pastoral need to care for all married couples, including those who struggle to accept the Church’s teachings about the sacrament of matrimony. This sacrament is at the heart of the Church’s understanding of the sanctity of human life, from conception until natural death. The Plenary Council affirms the need for an ongoing catechumenate of life, as part of the catechumenate for marriage, supported by local diocesan Offices for Life and Family and the Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement (Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Chapter 6; Francis, Address to the Roman Rota, 21 January 2017; John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 22 November 1981, n.66; “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World: The Final Report of the Synod of Bishops, 2015”, nn. 57-58). Such catechumenates support those who are most vulnerable in our society. At the same time, they affirm the unique contributions of mothers and fathers to a healthy society. In these ways the Council affirms the union between Christ and the Church, and a call for unity between men and women in a world marked both by sin and by Christ’s redemptive grace.

14. **THEREFORE**, this Plenary Council affirms the fundamental importance of a sacramental, joyful and spiritually rich prayer life that is transformed, transforming and inclusive:

- a. To promote people’s fully conscious and active participation in the Church’s liturgy and sacraments, as well as spiritual nourishment through other forms of prayer, the Plenary Council urges renewal in liturgical catechesis and formation. The Council encourages the provision of liturgical and other prayer resources that enhance the dignified and reverent celebration of the liturgy and other opportunities for formation at the national and diocesan levels.

- b. It commits the Catholic Church in Australia to breathing “with her two lungs,” (John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, n. 54) - East and West - respecting, fostering, and promoting the rich heritage of each tradition.
- c. It requests the Bishops Commission for Liturgy to prepare a new English translation of the Roman Missal that is both faithful to the original text and sensitive to the call for language that communicates clearly and includes all in the assembly.

FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
COMMUNION IN GRACE: SACRAMENT TO THE WORLD
DECREE

The Fifth Plenary Council decrees:

Article 1

That dioceses promote exercise of and formation for the ministries of Lector, Acolyte and Catechist.

Article 2

That in the light of the change in circumstances over the past twenty years, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference review the provisions and guidelines it issued in May 2003 for lay people to participate in a formal ministry of Preaching in the Latin Church, as provided for in canon 766 of the Code of Canon Law.

Article 3

That the Bishops' Commission for Liturgy institute a sustained program of catechesis of the Sacrament of Penance to promote an understanding of the conditions for, and appropriate practice of, each of the three forms of the Rite of Penance.

Article 4

That the Plenary Council request that the Holy Father consider whether the Third Form of the Rite of Penance might have wider use on occasions when it is particularly appropriate, granted an understanding among the Faithful of its distinctive nature and requirements.

The Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia will interpret the decrees of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia in accordance with the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches and the traditions of each church *sui iuris*.

In accordance with canon 446 of the Code of Canon Law, this decree is not to be promulgated until it has been reviewed by the Apostolic See. It will be promulgated in *Australasian Catholic Record* and the website of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in accordance with its usual practice. The decrees will oblige six months after promulgation.

Signed:

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB
President

Bishop Shane Mackinlay
Vice-President

Date:



FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

FORMATION AND LEADERSHIP FOR MISSION AND MINISTRY

1. Pope Francis has observed that “what we are experiencing is *not simply an epoch of changes, but an epochal change* . . . It entails decisions that rapidly transform our ways of living, of relating to one another, of communicating and thinking, of how different generations relate to one another and how we understand and experience faith and science.” (Francis, “Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia,” 21 December 2019). This context calls for a re-assessment of the Church’s models of formation for leadership at all levels to ensure that they address the needs of the People of God, promote the mission of evangelisation, and strengthen the witness of all the baptised through personal and communal conversion.
2. Throughout the dialogue and discernment of the Plenary Council, many recognised the need for appropriate formation and support to assist lay people in discerning and using their gifts wisely. The small group responses from the First General Assembly identified the need for a variety of formation opportunities for members of the Church from leaders of Catholic entities to parish family groups, from isolated parishes in the outback to Archdiocesan chanceries and for people in formal and informal roles. The formation and leadership of clergy was also identified as critical to the growth of dioceses and parishes and to future efforts at evangelisation in the wider community. The call for concrete action to address improvements in governance and leadership and formation for a wider range of ministries consistently emerged as an important priority of this Council’s deliberations.
3. The contexts, resources and challenges of parish life and ministry vary markedly across this vast land. Therefore, formation as a deepening of our knowledge of God and our discipleship of Christ needs to be adapted to the local circumstances. Such formation requires creative multi-dimensional, integrated and experiential models and methods, which acknowledge the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Church and support the Catholic identity, vocation and mission of families, faith communities, schools, institutions and agencies. The present moment is complex and requires a fundamental renewal of our missionary energies as well as the scope and style of resources needed to respond to what God is asking of us at this time.

4. Pastoral leadership requires being attentive to the voice of the Spirit within the Church and beyond, and must cultivate commitment, mutuality, and synodality within the whole ecclesial community. While encouraging and nurturing the gifts of others, the call to Christian leadership necessarily requires fidelity to the Gospel and a continual growth and renewal of our closeness to Jesus Christ. Through their living witness to the great virtues of faith, hope and love, and their proclamation of the Word, Christian leaders encourage the ecclesial community in the way of ongoing conversion which, in turn, supports and furthers missionary discipleship. Through appropriate and fruitful ecclesial formation, each of the baptised comes to realise their missionary identity. Each member of the faithful is, indeed, a mission, called to bring fullness of life, blessing and healing to all people (Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, n. 273). As all the baptised are called to be missionary disciples, all should be equipped and supported through regular opportunities and programs for ministerial and missionary formation. To give flesh and bones to God's love in contemporary Australia, such formation should incorporate grounding in scripture and tradition, liturgy, proclamation of the kerygma of the Risen Christ, the teaching of the Church about the God-given dignity of life, Catholic Social Teaching, and formation in practices of synodality, interculturality, ecumenical dialogue, and interfaith relations.

5. Much work has already been undertaken in the area of formation, including the publication by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference of *Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* and *Guidelines for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* (2016), a national resource for Lay Pastoral Ministers, *Faithful Stewards of God's Grace*, (2018), and *Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry* (2014). New national guidelines for seminary formation have also been approved by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and are in the final stages of being confirmed by the Holy See. The National Catholic Safeguarding Standards also require the development and implementation of policies for the ongoing formation of clergy, including professional/pastoral supervision, and there are opportunities to extend this into broader requirements for the professional development of lay leaders and ordained ministers. Many diocesan and eparchial agencies, ministerial public juridic persons, and tertiary institutions offer programs and courses for the formation of lay leaders, and those preparing for or engaged in ordained ministry. Therefore, multiple resources can be drawn upon and integrated into new strategies which respond to the call of this Council.

6. A renewed focus for formation will prioritise formation of the domestic Church by encouraging and accompanying parents, guardians, and caregivers in their vocation as "the primary and principal" teachers of faith and recognising the crucial role of families as the "school" of Christian formation (Vatican II, Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 28 October 1965, n. 3). The Plenary Council recognises that formation for married life and parenting, arising from the baptismal vocation, requires an intentional and ongoing ministry of peer support, spiritual and sacramental accompaniment, and discerning reflection on and support for the challenges of each phase of married and family life. Formation for families requires new and creative strategies that correspond to the rhythms of family life and provide accompaniment at all stages of their journey.

7. Responding to the call for a renewal of formation, the Plenary Council endorses principles and strategies that develop models of formation to encourage and strengthen the apostolate of the laity in the world. This apostolate offers a particular prophetic sign by

seeking the common good and by concrete actions that protect and promote human dignity, peace and justice. Attentive to the 'signs of the times', movements of the lay apostolate, in their various forms, offer the baptised a way to reflect on the concrete experiences of their lives in the light of the Gospel and engage as missionary disciples in the world. As a means for formation, the apostolate of the laity is grounded in scriptural reflection, reception of the ecclesial wisdom of our tradition, and prayerful communal discernment. This formation shapes Christian engagement with the broader Australian community through listening and dialogue, and supports actions for the transformation of society through daily commitment and public witness.

8. In addressing these concerns for formation, it is important to consider and provide for both the needs of communities in this present time and the needs of the next generation. Particular attention is required to attend to the formation needs of regional and rural communities. Formation in faith and new forms of missionary discipleship lie at the heart of this Council's work of planning for the future.

9. **THEREFORE**, to meet the formation needs of the present and future, the Plenary Council commits the Church in Australia to developing and committing to a culture of life-long faith formation that will ensure:

- a. the diversity of the Catholic community is explicitly recognised;
- b. intercultural competency is encouraged, especially in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and spiritualities;
- c. the equal dignity of women and men is affirmed and demonstrated;
- d. the renewal of faith formation within and for families in the context of the critical role that marriage, parenting, and care-giving plays as a school of formation, is prioritised and strengthened;
- e. the apostolate of the laity, along with new ecclesial realities, acting as "leaven in the world," (Lumen Gentium n. 31) is promoted, encouraged and supported;
- f. the hopes, spirituality, giftedness, energy, and modes of communication and connection of young people are identified, incorporated, encouraged and celebrated;
- g. ongoing support and strategies for those who minister to young people;
- h. the rich variety of spiritual and devotional traditions of the Church are appreciated and celebrated; and
- i. synodal practices such as encounter, accompaniment, listening, dialogue, discernment, and collaboration are fostered and deepened.

FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
FORMATION AND LEADERSHIP FOR MISSION AND MINISTRY

DECREE

The Fifth Plenary Council decrees:

Article 1

That each diocese and eparchy develop or strengthen strategic policies grounded in fidelity to the Gospel and closeness to Jesus Christ, to identify and support ministry and leadership formation. These will:

- a. acknowledge the generational, cultural and ethnic diversity of the contemporary Church in Australia;
- b. recognise the changing community profile of many parish and faith communities, incorporating an awareness of and outreach to those beyond these communities;
- c. enhance knowledge and skills for participating in local churches' structures and processes for consultation, dialogue and decision-making;
- d. address the particular needs of clergy, with focuses on initial formation and selection processes, and ongoing support and formation;
- e. include strategies for initiation, ongoing formation and appropriate forms of mentoring and accompaniment (human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral) that foster collaboration and are grounded in adult education principles;
- f. provide ongoing support and strategies for those who minister to young people;
- g. support opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics to undertake formation and training, ensuring that local circumstances and social data are taken into account; and
- h. consider avenues for financial support through scholarships, sponsorships and grants.

Article 2

That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference commission the Australian Catholic Biblical Association and the Australian Catholic Theological Association to liaise with appropriate Catholic and diocesan agencies, institutions and educational providers in order to enhance cross-institutional engagement and development of resources and formation programs. The design of these resources and programs will carefully consider the needs of rural, remote, and regional areas and creatively assess the use of available technology in order to improve delivery and accessibility.

Article 3

That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference establish a working group with expertise in formation to develop national Formation for Leadership strategies and guidelines designed for clergy, religious and lay leaders to address the possibilities and challenges of synodal

leadership in parishes and diocesan and eparchial agencies and support the Church's work of evangelisation. These strategies and guidelines will:

- a. have a national scope and be adaptable to local circumstances;
- b. aim to enhance competencies in leadership and commitment to synodal practices, with a focus on building communities that are welcoming to all, with particular attention to those on the margins of society and the Church;
- c. identify and promote models of effective engagement with government and civil society;
- d. ensure leaders are formed in scripture, tradition and ecclesiology; and
- e. foster a spirituality of leadership through personal and communal prayer, connection to the sacramental life of the church, and commitment to service

Article 4

That the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference establish a working group with expertise in Catholic Social Teaching to develop a national framework for formation in Catholic Social Teaching that will encourage, support and expand the offering of programs in Catholic Social Teaching. Situated within the broader teaching and mission of the Church, this framework will emphasise the social dimension of the Church's mission, incorporating contemporary analysis of the Australian context, with a particular focus on the formation requirements of leaders in Catholic social service, health and aged care organisations, Catholic education and dioceses.

The Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia will interpret the decrees of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia in accordance with the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches and the traditions of each church sui iuris.

In accordance with canon 446 of the Code of Canon Law, this decree is not to be promulgated until it has been reviewed by the Apostolic See. It will be promulgated in *Australasian Catholic Record* and the website of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in accordance with its usual practice. The decrees will oblige six months after promulgation.

Signed:

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB
President

Bishop Shane Mackinlay
Vice-President

Date:



FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

AT THE SERVICE OF COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, AND MISSION: GOVERNANCE

1. In Baptism, the Holy Spirit gives believers, and therefore the whole Church, a special gift so that together they can faithfully interpret and live the Christian Gospel in the diverse circumstances of history and culture – the *sensus fidei* (*Lumen Gentium* n. 12; cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2 March 2018, nn. 24, 56, 113). The Spirit enables ongoing discernment of the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel (*Gaudium et Spes*, nn. 4, 11). All the baptised participate in the three offices of Christ as a priestly, prophetic, and royal people (*Lumen Gentium*, nn. 31, 35).
2. By calling for the practice of synodality, Pope Francis aims to embed more deeply in the life of the Church the central teachings of Vatican II. These include the Council's emphasis on the Holy Spirit's gift of the *sensus fidei* to each, the participation of the entire faithful in the mission of the Church and its call for dialogue within the Church and beyond. Synodality is a constitutive element of the life of the Church, Pope Francis says, quoting Saint John Chrysostom: "Church and Synod are synonymous" (*Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*).
3. The practice of synodality requires greater transparency in decision-making and the overcoming of "a 'culture of clericalism' that promotes privilege and enables abuse of power." Pope Francis has stressed that "it can prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general" (*Evangelium Gaudium*, n. 104). Attending carefully to Pope Francis' reminder and the principle of subsidiarity, those whose roles involve responsibility for decision-taking need to ensure that decision-making is not confined to those who exercise sacramental ministry. Those who will be affected by a decision should have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and express their view before the decision is taken, to the extent that this is possible and appropriate. As decision-making authority in the Church is most often exercised by the ordained, there should be careful attention to ensuring that the voices of lay women and men, as well as Religious, are heard and considered on all matters, especially those that impact distinctively on them (cf. *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, nn. 105,104; *Evangelium Gaudium*, n. 102).
4. As Vatican II and Pope Francis have emphasised, the practice of synodality is integral to the Church's discernment of what the Gospel demands in particular circumstances and to what pastoral action this requires to serve for the good of all.

5. **THEREFORE**, this Plenary Council:

- a. affirms that governance in the Catholic Church should be exercised in a synodal manner, with the appropriate participation of all the baptised. For a diocese or eparchy, this would mainly involve the participation of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Council of Priests, the College of Consultors, the Diocesan Finance Council, the Diocesan Curia, various boards and governance bodies, and, at times, a Diocesan Synod. For a parish, this would mainly involve the participation of the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee;
- b. recognises and affirms the commitment of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference that “within five years following the closing session of the Plenary Council . . . each Diocese conduct a Diocesan Synod and every ten years thereafter” and encourages dioceses and eparchies to begin planning for this after the conclusion of the Plenary Council (*The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia* (2020), recommendation 56; cf. Response of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to *The Light from the Southern Cross*);
- c. calls for all dioceses and eparchies to establish a Diocesan Pastoral Council and affirms the continuing work of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the National Centre for Pastoral Research to develop guidelines and provide resources for the establishing and flourishing of Diocesan Pastoral Councils, Parish Pastoral Councils, and other appropriate synodal structures (*The Light from the Southern Cross*, recommendations 50–55);
- d. recognises and affirms the many initiatives already undertaken at parish, diocesan, eparchial, and national levels to implement recommendations agreed to in the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference response to *The Light from the Southern Cross*; and
- e. commits the Church in Australia to fostering the discernment and synodal leadership envisaged at Vatican II, called for by Pope Francis and experienced in the Plenary Council’s journey through the actions proposed below.

FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

AT THE SERVICE OF COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, AND MISSION: GOVERNANCE

DECREE

Article 1

That dioceses and eparchies support parishes to establish and strengthen appropriate synodal structures by developing guidelines and providing resources for the flourishing of Parish Pastoral Councils, Parish Finance Committees, and other parish bodies.

Article 2

That representatives from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Catholic Religious Australia and the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons form a working group to conduct appropriate and broad consultation, to develop and establish a National Catholic Synodal Life Roundtable, to foster, assess, and report periodically on the development of synodal leadership across the Church in Australia. The roundtable will bring together representative members of those groups with Diocesan Pastoral Councils and other key national bodies of the Church, including Catholic social and community services, health, and education.

Article 3

That the National Centre for Pastoral Research be commissioned to study the implementation of recommendations from *The Light from the Southern Cross* which has already happened, to identify examples of effective initiatives that have been taken and thus promote further implementation of those recommendations judged helpful and practicable.

The Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia will interpret the decrees of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia in accordance with the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches and the traditions of each church *sui iuris*.

In accordance with canon 446 of the Code of Canon Law, this decree is not to be promulgated until it has been reviewed by the Apostolic See. It will be promulgated in *Australasian Catholic Record* and the website of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in accordance with its usual practice. The decrees will oblige six months after promulgation.

Signed:

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB
President

Bishop Shane Mackinlay
Vice-President

Date:



FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

INTEGRAL ECOLOGY AND CONVERSION FOR THE SAKE OF OUR COMMON HOME

1. As drought, bushfires, floods, and extreme weather become more common in Australia, we realise the urgency of responding to our baptismal calling of taking up God's mission of love for the whole of creation.
2. Throughout the Scriptures we learn of God's love for creation, from the affirmation of the goodness of creation in Genesis (Genesis 1:2–4) to the Book of Revelation's vision of a creation made new (Revelation 21:5). All life and all that sustains it comes from God the Creator as gift, and so we are committed to care for our Common Home, and to cherish and promote the dignity of human life from conception to natural death. Local and universal Catholic Social Teaching, too, has helped us to reflect on how we might live in right relationship with the Creator, one another, and all of creation.
3. Pope Francis' landmark Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (2015) powerfully pointed out that we do not stand outside creation but are "joined in a splendid universal communion" with other creatures and are called to care for the common home which we share with them (n. 220). In their Social Justice Statement 2021–22, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, the Australian Bishops also affirm that we need "an integral approach to economic, social and ecological issues" – an integral ecology – if we are to address the interlocking crises of our times.
4. *Laudato Si'* reiterates Pope Saint John Paul II's call to ecological conversion and encourages the Church especially to undertake ecological education and to foster ecological spirituality (General Audience, 17 January 2001; *Laudato Si'* Chapter 6). The call to ecological conversion is part of the call to defend human life from conception to natural death, especially those who are most vulnerable, and to care for all forms of life on Earth, because "systems of life and love are deeply interconnected" (John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 25 March 1995, n. 93). Responding to this call requires new ways of seeing the world, thinking, and behaving (John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation*, World Day of Peace Message 1990, n. 13; *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*). Ecological conversion entails turning from human dominance to belonging to the community of life and to interdependence with all other creatures, awe in the beauty of creation and being nourished by a sense of God's presence (*Laudato Si'* n. 223).

5. Ecological conversion is both personal and communal, and therefore we must act to care for creation in ways that are both personal and communal. Such action will be informed by Scripture, our theological tradition, Catholic Social Teaching, human knowledge and scientific insight. In responding to these issues, we acknowledge the “unique place of the wisdom of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who were caring for country before Abraham set out for the promised land, and who continue to do so today” (*Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*). As part of the Oceania Region, we have a particular responsibility to act in solidarity with the peoples of the region to ensure that their voices are heard and attended to in discussions and initiatives in the Church and the international community.

6. The Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development’s *Laudato Si’* Action Platform provides a unique global vehicle for communal action. In *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, the Bishops Conference committed itself to joining the Platform and developing a *Laudato Si’* Action Plan. Individuals and families, parishes, dioceses and eparchies, educational institutions, healthcare and healing organisations, businesses and the economic sector, organisations and groups, along with religious institutes can all participate either by developing their own *Laudato Si’* Action Plans or by taking part in an established Action Plan.

7. **THEREFORE**, this Plenary Council:

- a. recognises the sacred duty to care for and protect the Earth as a common home for all God’s creatures, including the generations to come;
- b. encourages all Catholic people, families, parishes, dioceses, eparchies, religious institutes, educational institutions, and other Catholic organisations to accept Pope Francis’ invitation to join the *Laudato Si’* Action Platform and either develop *Laudato Si’* Action Plans, or participate in existing *Laudato Si’* Action Plans, as a vehicle for their ecological conversion; and
- c. promotes initiatives in Church and society which promote and defend human life from conception to natural death, especially those who are most vulnerable.

FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
INTEGRAL ECOLOGY AND CONVERSION FOR THE SAKE OF OUR COMMON HOME

DECREE

The Fifth Plenary Council decrees:

Article 1

That, witnessing to their communal ecological conversion and the urgent need for action, by 2024, each Catholic parish, diocese, eparchy, educational institution or organisation commits to joining the *Laudato Si'* Platform; and by 2030 either develops its own or participates in an established *Laudato Si'* Action Plan which includes the following elements:

- a. a public commitment;
- b. a governance model, processes and procedures;
- c. a mechanism for listening to the ecological wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, developed in partnership with Aboriginal Catholic Ministry and diocesan justice, ecology and peace bodies where these exist;
- d. regular reporting on progress towards and accountability for defined goals and objectives; and
- e. co-construction of those goals and objectives with the people they are meant to support and serve.

The Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia will interpret the decrees of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia in accordance with the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches and the traditions of each church *sui iuris*.

In accordance with canon 446 of the Code of Canon Law, this decree is not to be promulgated until it has been reviewed by the Apostolic See. It will be promulgated in *Australasian Catholic Record* and the website of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in accordance with its usual practice. The decrees will oblige six months after promulgation.

Signed:

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB
President

Bishop Shane Mackinlay
Vice-President

Date:

FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE OF THE FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL
DECREE

The Fifth Plenary Council of Australia decrees:

Article 1

That the Plenary Council adopt the following steps for ensuring the effectiveness and accountability of the Implementation phase, to take place over a period of five years:

- a. the Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council will be responsible for establishing terms of review for the Plenary Council's implementation;
- b. a roundtable body such as that proposed in Decree 7, Article 2, will be responsible for co-ordinating the review;
- c. interim reports will be published in 2023 and 2025; and
- d. the final review report will be published five years after the Second Assembly, in 2027.

The Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia will interpret the decrees of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia in accordance with the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches and the traditions of each church *sui iuris*.

In accordance with canon 446 of the Code of Canon Law, this decree is not to be promulgated until it has been reviewed by the Apostolic See. It will be promulgated in *Australasian Catholic Record* and the website of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in accordance with its usual practice. The decrees will oblige six months after promulgation.

Signed:

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB
President

Bishop Shane Mackinlay
Vice-President

Date:

FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
THE DECREES OF THE FOURTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
DECREE

The Fifth Plenary Council of Australia decrees:

Article 1

That the Plenary Council note that many of the Decrees of the Fourth Plenary Council of Australia have been abrogated by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, and subsequent universal law, and refer the 685 decrees to a competent canonical panel to determine those whose validity may endure, so that they may be restated in local law and any appropriate amendments may be made at diocesan synods or by appropriate persons in the next five years.

In accordance with canon 446 of the Code of Canon Law, this decree is not to be promulgated until it has been reviewed by the Apostolic See. It will be promulgated in *Australasian Catholic Record* and the website of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in accordance with its usual practice. The decrees will oblige six months after promulgation.

Signed:

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB

President

Bishop Shane Mackinlay
Vice-President

Date: