

Diocesan Pastoral Council submission

Blackfriars Parish

This submission was put together by a group of Blackfriars Parish parishioners who are members of the parish renewal team. It follows an invitation in the parish bulletin for submissions and a further invitation to an online meeting. We recognise that the views set out here may not represent the views of all Blackfriars Parish parishioners.

1. *Why should the Archbishop constitute a Diocesan Pastoral Council?*

A Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) would be an avenue for the Holy Spirit to speak to the Archbishop through the charisms that the Spirit gifts to all the people of God. To guide dioceses, Pope Francis has stressed that bishops need such pastoral councils.

A DPC would help the Church to function better through an embracing of culture and structures of inclusion and co-responsibility. It would, we agree, assist the Archdiocese reading the signs of the times, asking 'what is God asking of us today?' and proclaiming the Gospel.

2. *In your view what role might a Diocesan Pastoral Council play in the life of the Archdiocese?*

The Plenary Council consultation made clear the desire for a more open, listening and participative Church. A DPC should gather the different and especially less heard voices in the Archdiocese, and inform and work with the Archbishop to support, minister to and advocate for those voices and their communities' pastoral needs. And, in so doing, help to renew the Church.

More specifically, there are a number of things that a DPC could help build or facilitate, including:

- Discipleship and formation.
- A sense of church and community.
- Bringing together the strengths of the clergy, religious and laity.
- Communication, collaboration, connection and building relationships across the Archdiocese as members of the body of Christ in prayer. We endorse the proposition that parishes would benefit from the DPC being a forum for bringing together and sharing on 'issues, problems and solutions concerning pastoral affairs', and 'joining together in pastoral ministry and prophetic proclamation' (DPC, Full Report, p. 5).
- Mechanisms for feedback.
- Discerning what peak spiritual events will help grow the life of the Archdiocese.
- Development of an Archdiocesan Reconciliation Action Plan.

- A bridge between local faith communities and the national and global Church.
- Promoting the wellbeing of those who work for the Archdiocese (employees and volunteers).
- Improvement of the planning and governance processes of the Archdiocese.

3. *To fulfil its synodal mission, a Pastoral Council should be both representative and skilled – what advice can you offer to the Archbishop about how best to achieve these goals?*

DPC membership should be diverse, as set out on page 36 of the DPC Full Report. Further, the minimum female representation on the DPC should be at least 50% of the lay representation.

We think it important that the process for determining DPC membership include disseminating widely the DPC roles as eventually established, and allowing part of the membership to come from self-nomination and review by an independent panel to discern where the necessary gifts reside – followed by recommendations to the Archbishop.

Membership of a parish pastoral council should not be a sufficient criterion for DPC membership. Much more important is involvement in other forms of active ministry within the Church.

4. *Are there elements/issues that you believe the Summary or the full Report have missed that are important for the Archbishop to consider?*

Neither the Summary nor full Report pay sufficient attention to ecumenism. Whilst acknowledging the profound ecumenical relationship between Archbishop Christopher and other Christian leaders in the region (evidenced, for example, in the joint Alpha program initiative and Week of Prayer for Christian Unity), there appears to be little active support at an institutional level (for example, on the Archdiocesan website, in the form of Ecumenism Office/Commission etc).

In his Encyclical on Ecumenism ('Ut Unum Sint'), St Pope John Paul II said: 'Thus it is absolutely clear that ecumenism ... is not just some sort of "appendix" which is added to the Church's traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does'. The fact that nearly 60% of all marriages in the Archdiocese involving a Catholic are inter-church marriages, further highlights how critical is active ecumenical engagement.

There is the potential for much to be achieved in terms of the expressed aims of evangelising, service and promoting human flourishing in a fulfilled creation through ecumenical collaboration. Recent examples of this in North Canberra have been collaboration and coordination between Blackfriars Parish, Holy Cross Anglican Church and St Margaret's Church on Alpha, *Laudato Si'* dialogue, moves to establish a Christian Economists Group, inter-church youth group, Lenten preparation and the annual combined churches Christmas Nativity Display and Carols.

Both Pope Francis and Archbishop Christopher have built very good ecumenical relationships. We encourage the DPC to build on this, for example by establishing a subcommittee of the DPC to foster such initiatives.