

**Plenary Council  
Listening and Discerning**

**How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is humble, healing and merciful?**

During this time of Listening and Discernment, despite the limitations imposed by COVID-19, our Parish has put forward ideas and suggestions that demonstrate our strong commitment to our own community and that of the Australian Church. We are a diverse parish, and not all suggestions would be supported by every individual, but they represent a wonderful sign of people willing to nurture and share their own faith journey and reach out to others in the peace and love of Christ.

The laity of South Belconnen Parish in the ACT endorse the need for reforms in our Church. Such reforms need to prioritise inclusiveness, accountability, and transparency at parish and diocesan levels.

The Themes and Actions below provide detailed focus on these much needed reforms:

**Themes:**

**Humble:**

- centrality of the Blessed Sacrament, the Mass and the Eucharist to our faith and parish life.
- importance of humility and service of others
- support the practice of contemplative prayer
- need to reclaim the idea of the Church as 'humble servants', not powerful people
- the church should follow a 'stewardship model' of governance.
- the Church embodies both the institutional hierarchy and the living people of God
- non-implementation of many of the reforms of Vatican 11 eg 'Catacombs' Pact of the Poor and Servant Church.
- all people in the Church, including bishops and clergy need to be open to change
- laity can act without waiting for permission from the clergy
- discern God's will in our lives through a personal relationship with Him, and do it

**Healing:**

- the Church needs to embody shared responsibility (between clergy and laity), transparency and accountability
- healing is required for the scourge of child sexual abuse and the treatment of women and others who are perceived to have transgressed against Church teachings eg gay people.
- hold fast to teachings but enable interpretations to be reviewed
- imperative to forgive each other
- forgiveness is essential for the healing of our broken Church
- we are loved and forgiven by God
- be open; not limited by fear, or rules
- we are saved, so let's share that Good News
- ecumenism as a source of healing among the Christian churches

**Merciful:**

- God's message of mercy needs to be shared and proclaimed
- we are all sinners and in need of mercy
- inflexibility can lead to judgement
- always look to the edges, to the marginalised and outcasts
- most important commandment is to love
- everyone is loved by God.
- we need a better awareness of what is already done in the name of the Church and find ways for individual parishioners to feel connected with social justice actions.

▪ **Actions:**

Flowing from the themes above, parishioners suggested a number of specific actions:

**Humble:**

- Parishes need to support the regular practices of Exposition and Benediction as a way to acknowledge our total reliance on God. This will then encourage the development of service to others, such as taking Holy Communion to the sick and housebound.
- The Church needs to set up parish structures that foster the formation of mature and committed laity and clergy, and promote a greater sense of co-responsibility for the existence and

activities of the Church. Such reforms will lead to improved transparency and accountability, and reduce the secrecy and power abuse that has happened in the past with such devastating consequences. Lay people need ways to study Scriptures and Theology.

- In order to present as a humble Church, we need to divest ourselves of all privilege and status. Clergy need to acknowledge their limitations and accept the expertise of the laity.
- The Church needs to reclaim the virtue of humility by following the promises set out in the 'Pact of the Catacombs', made by 42 bishops in 1965, towards the end of the Vatican Council. The Pact lists 13 actions that are primarily designed to ensure the Church, and the bishops in particular, live humble and pastoral lives, focussed on being with their people. The actions specifically include refusing any possessions, language or way of living that involve status or privilege.
- The Church needs to seriously consider how it has failed people who have substantial needs that have been overlooked. Eg divorcees, women, LGBTIQ people.
- The formation of priests should include regular parish community placements, to complement their spiritual programs, theological studies etc on the 6th to ordination.
  
- Healing:
  - Greater transparency and accountability in structures, processes, appointments, and decision making, will help to bring internal healing to our broken Church.
  - Healing within the Church could be fostered by more attention and welcome being given to groups that are currently excluded from full participation, such as women, divorced and remarried people, and people who are disabled, gay and other gendered people.
  - Despite the challenge, Catholic people need to offer forgiveness to the institutional church for its perceived arrogance, inflexibility, dogmatism, and for placing formalism over substance.
  - The Church needs to remind people that Jesus forgives and dispenses his mercy through all the sacraments. People are often looking for healing.
  - All Catholics should lovingly consider other points of view and not rely on 'set agendas' as a way to promote healing within our parishes.
  - The Church already has various ways to bring healing to our parishes and our external communities, and as individuals we could pay more attention to the Bishops' Statements each year, the work of St Vincent de Paul and other organisations. Such healing could also be supported through individuals becoming involved in Parish activities.
  - The whole issue of ecumenism needs to be revisited as a way to heal the divisions that have developed over centuries. Catechetics is a way for Catholics to learn more about their faith and share it with others. Parishes could also reach out to local churches to organise a service during the Week for Christian Unity. Ecumenism also needs to include people of non-Christian faiths.
  
- Merciful:
  - The most important message that needs to be lived and proclaimed in every Parish is the fact of God's mercy. Our actions, words and prayers need to radiate God's mercy.
  - When people are perceived to have transgressed against Church teaching, they still need to be reassured of God's love and be welcomed in the community.
  - Each of us needs to take individual responsibility for seeking and reaching out in mercy to those on the margins, of the Church and/or of society.
  - After Mass on Sunday each week, each parish in Australia could have a gold coin collection to be administered by the Bishops' Conference. Such a collection would demonstrate to the whole community the Church's commitment to the needy and could be used for programs designed to respond to child abuse survivors, the homeless, Indigenous people etc.
  - There should never be restrictions on who can participate fully in our parish communities. We are all in need of God's mercy.