

**Plenary Council  
Listening and Discerning**

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

In its suggestions for these sessions, the Plenary Council team has asked that we first focus on themes emerging from the suggested scriptural readings and our own reflections and experiences. Then we are invited to use these themes to formulate ideas for actions that might lead us to be a 'Christ-centred Church that is humble, healing and merciful'.

I received seven submissions responding to this question, and I thank those people for their efforts during this difficult time. Wherever possible I have tried to be faithful to the words used in the submissions, although it has not been possible to include all the reflections. I apologise if I have misrepresented anyone's thoughts!

In order to summarise the seven very different submissions and to enable other parishioners to respond to the ideas, I have grouped them into 'themes' and 'actions'.

**Themes:**

**Humble:**

- centrality of the Blessed Sacrament to our faith.
- importance of humility and service of others
- 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
- 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.
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**Actions:**

Now that we have a list of the sorts of themes that emerged in the submissions, what specific actions did the seven people propose to ensure the Australia Church is humble, healing and merciful?

**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.
  - 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.
  - The formation of priests should be done primarily within local communities, so they are embedded in the ordinariness and messiness of 'normal life'.
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- 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.
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- 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 parish could have a gold coin collection specifically for the work of reaching out and responding to particular disadvantaged groups in the parish. This would hopefully offer real support and would also unite the parish in a common cause for social justice.
  - There should never be restrictions on who can participate fully in our parish communities. We are all in need of God's mercy.

So once again, thank you to those who submitted ideas and suggestions!

Could all parishioners now consider the ideas shared above, and if you have any comments on them, please submit them to me by **Friday 29 May, via the parish email address or through the post.**

I am not asking for new ideas as such, just a response to those already expressed above.

Within a week, I will then send our contribution to the Plenary Council and provide a copy to the Parish.

Many thanks  
Beth Gibson.