



Looking to the Plenary Council

A reflection by Paul Cahill O.Carm,
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As the leader of a Religious Institute, I have the opportunity to participate in the forthcoming Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia. The first session, which will occur online, is scheduled for October this year and the second session for July 2022.

Being a cleric as well as a religious, it was with some hesitation that I accepted the opportunity to participate in this Plenary Council. I think there will be more than enough clerics participating in the Council by right and, in my view, the laity will be underrepresented. I think one of the crucial tasks of the Council is to address issues of governance and participation in decision making in the Church so that the voices and the talents of all the baptized are given due recognition. I know this viewpoint will be strongly advanced by religious participating in the Council. It is a viewpoint that I will be strongly aligned with. I am hopeful, too, that many of the participating clerics will also strongly hold to it and that the Council will be effective in promoting changes in structures and procedures which will see a greater involvement of all the baptized in Church governance and decision making.

Following the lead of Pope Francis and in the spirit of Vatican II, those preparing the Council are very aware that it needs to be a “synodal” experience.

This is to say that everyone has a voice that needs to be heard in responding to the fundamental question: *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?* A very widespread



consultation was held to get initial responses to this question and, as to be expected, there was a wide variety of opinions, at times contradictory, expressed in the 220,000 responses which were received. From these responses, it has been suggested that there are six main themes which the Council needs to keep in mind as it tries to discern, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a way forward for the Church in Australia. These themes suggest that, in facing the future, the Church needs to be:

- i. Missionary and Evangelising;
- ii. Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal;
- iii. Prayerful and Eucharistic;
- iv. Humble, Healing and Merciful;
- v. A Joyful, Hope-Filled and Servant Community;
- vi. Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform.

The process of finding a way forward will be necessarily messy. This is the way of “synodality” where the voices of all are heard and respected in an attempt to discover what the Spirit is saying through it all. In many ways, I think that the process or the journey of the Council is its most important aspect. As we heard in the early days of facing the coronavirus pandemic in Australia ... *We’re all in this together.* It will be hard to come to firm decisions or recommendations. If, however, decisions are just “handed down from on high”, the Council will have been a disastrous waste of time, energy and money. I do not believe, however, that this will happen. We may not come to many firm decisions or recommendations by the end of the formal Council. If, however, we can face the many

challenges to the Church in Australia today by listening respectfully to the voices of all, then, whilst decisions or recommendations will come slowly, we will learn to live in the “mess” as we discern the authentic voice of the Spirit emerging, albeit slowly.

It is essential, I believe, that all of us – clerics, religious and laity - can be patient with ourselves and each other as we grapple with the reality of our lives and our situation, whilst retaining hope that the voice of the Spirit will eventually prevail and that the kingdom of God will be advanced.



In attempting to listen to the voices of all, the Council must be very mindful of those whose voices have hitherto been muted or marginalized. There are many of these and our Australian society is helping us to be aware of some of them ... women, LGBTQI people, migrants and refugees, asylum seekers, first nations peoples, divorced and remarried people, young people, the diverse range of families, the poor and vulnerable, the disabled and frail elderly, victims of domestic violence, etc. The voice of creation itself also needs to be heard. It will be a significant challenge for the Council and for the Church looking to the future to hear the voices that haven't been heard very much, if at all, in the Council's preparatory consultation process. This includes the voices of those who have drifted away from the Church for whatever reason. Finding a way for the Church to be more inclusive, more open, more sensitive, more missionary, more true to Jesus and the Gospel is perhaps the greatest challenge of the Council if it is to help the Church be relevant, accessible and helpful to the people of Australia in the future.

A couple of months ago, I read an article by Teresa Pirola in *Catholic Outlook* (6 April 2021) entitled: *The hour of the domestic Church is NOW*. I was

struck by her reflection, in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, that “we are living through a moment in history when, in every parish and diocese around the world, the domestic space is the only place where most Catholics can be fully present to one another in celebrating their Catholic traditions. In fact, the terrible necessity of enforced home isolation has opened up an extraordinary opportunity: to call the faithful – family units of every kind and configuration – to rediscover their power to ‘be’ Church, each within their unique domestic context.”

Whilst Pirola was specifically making a case for people to be more focused on celebrating God's presence in the context of their real lived circumstances rather than viewing “live streamed” Church services, I believe she makes a broader point that the Plenary Council needs to take into account in discerning a path forward for the Australian Church. She says:
**THIS IS THE HOUR OF THE DOMESTIC CHURCH!
FAMILIES, LAY FAITHFUL, LEAD THE WAY! SHOW US HOW TO DO THIS. LEAVE YOUR MARK ON OUR PARISHES AND DIOCESES. SHIFT OUR GROUND TO A MORE FAMILIAL BASE; FREE US FROM CLINGING TO THE CLERICALIST WAYS OF THE PAST.**



The Church is in a crisis. Whilst uncomfortable, this is not a bad thing for us. A crisis is an opportunity for new growth. The challenge is to accept and respond to this opportunity. Taking up our priestly and prophetic role and being a Eucharistic people in the lived circumstances of our lives is called for. The Plenary Council is a vehicle for facilitating this. I pray that we don't squander it. Boldness is called for in hearing and responding to the voice of the Spirit, discerned in the voices of the people. May we advance in hope and trust in the Spirit.

*Paul Cahill, O.Carm.
Provincial*

WE PRAY, for the Catholic Church in Australia as we prepare for the First Assembly of the Plenary Council in October: that the Holy Spirit may inflame the hearts and minds of all so that we may experience a new Pentecost in this Great South Land of the Holy Spirit.

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY Saturday 5th June – Carmelite NGO Day of Prayer

Carmelite NGO complete liturgy for Day of Prayer: <http://carmelitengo.org/en/news-en/>

Pope Francis says: "It cannot be emphasised enough how everything is interconnected. Time and space are not independent of one another, and not even atoms of subatomic particles can be considered in isolation."

What are some examples of the 'Interconnectedness' of the universe that you have experienced in your own life?

How does seeing everything as connected change the way you see the world?

PRAYER

God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love;
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money,
that they may avoid the sin of indifference
that they may love the common good, advance the weak and
care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of
justice, peace, and love and beauty. Praise be to you.



World
Environment Day

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS AT WORK IN OUR FEDERAL COURT SYSTEM TO PROMOTE JUSTICE through empathy and understanding Can you feel it ?

It involves a class action brought against Environment Minister Sussan Ley by a group of young people, acting on behalf of all Australian children and teenagers. Their bid to prevent a coal mine expansion did not succeed. But the Federal Court nonetheless made a historic ruling: **the environment minister owes a duty of care to Australia's young people not to cause them harm from climate change.**

The finding was ground-breaking enough. But it was this moving excerpt from the written judgment by Justice Mordy Bromberg that really cut to the bone:

"It is difficult to characterise in a single phrase the devastation that the plausible evidence presented in this proceeding forecasts for the children. As Australian adults know their country, Australia will be lost and the world as we know it gone as well.

The physical environment will be harsher, far more extreme and devastatingly brutal when angry. As for the human experience – quality of life, opportunities to partake in nature's treasures, the capacity to grow and prosper – all will be greatly diminished. Lives will be cut short. Trauma will be far more common and good health harder to hold and maintain.

None of this will be the fault of nature itself. It will largely be inflicted by the inaction of this generation of adults, in what might fairly be described as the greatest inter-generational injustice ever inflicted by one generation of humans upon the next. To say that the children are vulnerable is to understate their predicament."

The no-holds-barred statement brought tears to the eyes of hardened lawyers, not to mention many other watchers of the case. [The Conversation – 29/5/21]

WALKING WITH OUR INDIGENOUS BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN RECONCILIATION WEEK

The Common Grace movement invites you to watch and share the Treaty video, as part of our commitment to being led by our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Leaders in pursuing friendship and Reconciliation in our lifetime. RECONCILIATION WEEK THEME: "**More than a word, Reconciliation takes action**".

https://www.commongrace.org.au/treaty?utm_campaign=watch_for_healing_country&utm_medium=email&utm_source=commongrace

POPE FRANCIS LAUNCHES PROGRAM TO PUT LAUDATO SI' INTO ACTION THROUGHOUT CHURCH ... <https://laudatosiainactionplatform.org/>

The Laudato Si' Action Platform is a seven-year journey towards ecological conversion launched by Pope Francis earlier this week.

The ambitious churchwide initiative outlines seven categories of sustainability goals in the spirit of Francis' 2015 encyclical, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," which emphasizes integral ecology. Seven sectors of the church are asked to achieve those goals within a seven-year timeframe.

The goals include:

- Adopting renewable energy;
- Achieving carbon neutrality;
- Defending all life;
- Solidarity with Indigenous peoples and vulnerable groups;
- Adopting simpler lifestyles;
- Fostering ecological education and spirituality;
- Advocating for sustainable development;
- Following ethical investment guidelines, including divestment from fossil fuels and other industries that harm the planet.



“What kind of world do we want to build together?” ~Pope Francis

NEWS FROM THE CARMELITE NGO, from Sr Jane Remson



An email was received from Sr Annah Theresa Nyadombo <nyadomboat@gmail.com>, a member of the Carmelite NGO, 21 May 2021

“Yes, COVID-19 has taken another shift; the poor are becoming poorer because they have no one to track check what is happening to them in terms of education supporting especially the girl child's sanitation, paying school fees developing life skills for sustainability, awareness raising on the pandemic through workshops to educate the majority of children in rural areas who are not even

able to have masks.

There is a need to promote justice through action and also to be able to evangelise through missionary work on capacity building and empowering the women and girls who are pillars of families in difficult times like these. If funds permit I would suggest we have a scholarship fund to support girls to access education and also to promote our service to the poor.

There is a need to raise awareness on countering trafficking. Recent months we have recorded quite a number of cases children being killed for ritual purposes, a rise on child sexual abuse and need to support girls to avoid pregnancies.

Thank you to those who you have contributed through supporting vulnerable girls who are victims of trafficking in Zimbabwe. Let us continue to pray for those in need of our prayers.

.... Annah”