

Feedback from St Augustine's Plenary Council Workshop #2 – 6th February 2019

Topics rated as important by parishioners in order of priority

1. Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

How can the Church at all levels deliver an empathetic, transparent and practical response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission?

Why is this topic important?

- The Royal Commission has brought unprecedented external and internal scrutiny on the Catholic Church in Australia
- The Royal Commission's recommendations align with other topics that parishioners feel are very important eg governance

What suggestions can we make?

- Being aware/mindful of child protection in all parishes at parish level, so that everyone makes this second nature
- To discuss and acknowledge
- Pope Francis should rethink candidates for priesthood – in terms of celibacy, celibacy shouldn't be compulsory
- Focus of God – God is love – not focus on the Church and its reputation and assets
- Address the power of the priest – the priest is often seen as 'boss' and were able to get away with it – parishioners to share responsibilities more – ties into first point with parishes becoming priestless
- Every crime should always be reported – priests should tell any perpetrator to turn themselves in if/when hearing in confessional
- A national 'sorry'/apology from Catholic clergy – just sorry – no defence, no buts, nothing but sorry with love and compassion – national day within the church
- Church door banners – we are sorry, you are welcome
- Offer of home masses/communion services so victims don't have to go to churches but can receive Eucharist in community – regular services
- Training for clergy and parishioners regarding mandatory reporting so they can be aware/alert – refresher training compulsory

2. Governance

How can greater participation of the laity in the decision-making process of the Church be fostered at national, archdiocesan and parish levels?

Why is this topic important?

- Fewer priests/resources – needs laity involvement
- People expect to be involved these days (not directed)
- Lack of transparency – knowing why/how
- Laity brings required skills

- Communication (up and down)
- Inertia towards traditional hierarchy / not transformation
- Active leadership at all levels
- Accountability – finances, reporting

What suggestions can we make?

- Empowerment in decision making – ability for laity to take leadership roles – ideas – youth
- Feedback up – why decisions affecting us are made – complaints process
- Parish Councils - themes/advocacy – leverage now what we have – more reporting – reach out more (eg youth)

3. Women in the Church

How can greater participation of women in decision-making, leadership and ministry be fostered in the Church?

Why is this topic important?

- Half the population (in some parishes more) are female
- Women currently do more of the nurturing/housekeeping and men participate on committees to a greater degree
- Hierarchy need to appreciate what women can contribute eg we have female judges – women better educated, independent
- Church needs to recognise female equality – other faiths do – eg Anglican

What suggestions can we make?

- Role models – we have none – eg nuns are not visible
- Need to introduce female acolytes – deacons – priests
- Get younger women – church needs to be relevant to them
- Married clergy
- Need to “talent pick/spot”, then educate & promote – needs to come from higher up – recognition of women’s abilities and talents

4. Reconnecting with the alienated

How can we reach out and reconnect with those members of the Catholic community who feel they have been marginalised and disenfranchised and no longer actively participate in the life of the Church?

Why is this topic important?

- Growing number of alienated people – we need to reconnect – affects the future growth of the Church

- Why people leave – time poor, relationship problems, LGBTI community, indigenous community, those who have had issues with the Church, people who have drifted away – church has become irrelevant

What suggestions can we make?

- Ways to reconnect – positive stories of Church, activism, social justice

5. Priesthood

What scope is there for reviewing issues relating to vocations to the priesthood including the issue of celibacy?

6. Church in the Media

How can our leaders play a more constructive role in public debate on issues of social justice and morality including through the secular media?

7. Catholic Schools

How can our Catholic schools play a stronger role in faith formation and a play a more significant role in the life of local parishes?

8. Signs of the times

How can all members of the Catholic Church in Australia be people who read the signs of the times in a way that offers a fresh and hopeful vision for the future?