

PREPARATION RESOURCE

Diocesan Assembly Themes and Questions

Themes:

- Inclusion and Healing
- Leadership and Leadership Formation
- Faith Formation and Spiritual Development
- Parish Life and Liturgy
- A Church that Responds to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor
- Outreach and Accompaniment with Children, Families and Young People

The Diocesan Assembly discernment process

Step One: Broad Consultation

Members of the Archdiocese of Adelaide were asked to respond to the question, “What do you think are the most important things to be discussed at the Diocesan Assembly?”

Step Two: Reflection on the Themes

Analysts read through all the consultation responses and developed the themes for the Diocesan Assembly. Participants of the Assembly are to read and reflect upon the themes and questions prior to the Diocesan Assembly.

Step Three: Diocesan Assembly Discussion Groups – Responding to the issues

Participants will be asked indicate to the top themes they wish to discuss at the Diocesan Assembly and they will be assigned to two discussion groups, each with a different theme. This is not a re-hashing of the consultation, rather it is a process of discerning what God is asking of us and responding to the needs of the community.

Step Four: Making Recommendations

The Diocesan Assembly discussion groups will develop recommendations for action, research, and further discernment for individuals, parishes, schools, communities, agencies, and the Archdiocese of Adelaide. These recommendations will be shared widely across the archdiocese and specifically with the new Diocesan Pastoral Council, whose tasks will include discerning ways to implement the Diocesan Assembly recommendations and Plenary Council decrees.

About this document

The Diocesan Assembly Themes have been developed from the local consultations for the Plenary Council and Diocesan Assembly. These themes reflect the agenda for the Plenary Council with an emphasis on the matters that members of the Archdiocese of Adelaide have indicated are most important to them.

Each section includes:

- the discussion theme;
- overarching question/provocation;
- synopsis of the consultation responses related to the theme;



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- questions for reflection;
- related quotes from church documents.

How to use this document

This document will be given to Diocesan Assembly participants.

This is intended to be a preparation resource for participants and not necessarily the guide for discussion groups. Participants are encouraged to begin with the Diocesan Assembly Prayer, and reflect upon each theme on their own,

Parishes, schools, communities, agencies and individuals not attending the Diocesan Assembly may also use this document to reflect on the themes and engage in their own discernment for action.

Theme One: Inclusion and Healing

Overarching Question:

How can we become a humble, healing and merciful Church that brings the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who have felt themselves excluded, have been hurt or felt judged as not worthy to belong?

From the Consultations

Many people asked the question, “how can we be a more welcoming and inclusive Church?” with particular emphasis on Aboriginal people, women, LGBT+ persons, Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, people with differing abilities, divorced Catholics and those who have left the church. Many others named protection for the vulnerable, the unborn, those in poverty, people living with illness, and the elderly, as important issues. There were divided responses on issues relating to family planning, end of life decisions and gender.

Others called on the Church to acknowledge its part in the abuse and harm of vulnerable people and children, particularly in regard to clergy sexual abuse, bullying, and institutional abuse of Aboriginal peoples. Many people called for a formal reconciliation process, liturgy or ritual from the Church as a way to begin the healing process.

Questions to consider:

When we think about our Church (our parishes, schools, services) which groups of people are missing or who do we see as underrepresented (e.g., people and groups who are marginalized, stigmatised, or hidden from society and the Church)?

How might we the Church in the Adelaide Archdiocese **meet the needs of the most vulnerable**, go to the margins, and be the presence of Christ in places that may be overlooked or left behind in South Australia today? How might we partner with others to do this?

How might we approach matters such as family planning and contraception, relationship breakdown, living together without marriage, remarriage after divorce, and gender and sexual identity, with **merciful, non-judgmental Gospel love**?

How might the Archdiocese be open to Aboriginal ways of being Christian including spirituality, theology, liturgy, and missionary discipleship? How might we **learn from the First Nations peoples**?

How might the Church work with our First Nations Peoples to acknowledge past hurts and walk together on a path towards reconciliation?

How might we **heal the wounds of abuse in all its forms**, coming to see through the eyes of those who have been abused?

- Could an Archdiocesan-led process of acknowledgement of the damage and hurt caused by clerical sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults contribute to healing?
- What suggestions do you have about the elements that such a process could include?
- What responses might individual parishes, schools and organisations make to support an Archdiocesan process?

Theme Two: Leadership and Leadership Formation

Overarching Question:

How could changes in our models of leadership build a stronger, more relatable Church responsive to the times? How do we best form people for these leadership roles?

From the Consultations:

Many people offered responses that dealt with leadership, directly and indirectly. There is great concern for issues relating to clergy, particularly the priesthood. Many are worried about the decreasing number of active clergy and low numbers of those entering the seminary. Clericalism and bullying, of both lay and ordained, was a significant concern. Many perceive their parish priests to be overworked, and stretched, some are detached from community life. Many are asking for the priesthood to be reimagined by being inclusive of married men, ordination of women, and laity. Clergy formation, before and after ordination was also a concern for many people. Several people expressed gratitude for the missionary and international priests serving in parishes in the Archdiocese but are concerned for their formation and wellbeing in a new culture.

Many are seeking a greater understanding of the role of the laity in church leadership, particularly for women and young people, and seeking greater collaboration between lay and ordained leaders. People are also seeking opportunities to develop leadership skills in ministry, governance, and pastoral life. Respondents also asked for guidance regarding pastoral councils, transparency of Church authorities and governance, and a more visible presence of the archbishop in the diocese.

Questions to Consider:

What could the Adelaide Archdiocese do to increase the number of people – lay women and men and ordained ministers - in leadership roles within the Church?

What new or refreshed **formation programs** are needed to support the development of lay and ordained leaders and how might these be resourced and supported?

How might **formation, both pre- and post -ordination**, better foster the development of bishops, priests and deacons who enable the full participation of all the baptized in all aspects of Church life?

Theme Three: Faith formation and Spiritual development

Overarching Question:

How do we build an informed and educated Catholic community that has a meaningful spiritual relationship with God?

From the Consultations:

Many people expressed a deep longing for faith formation and spiritual guidance. Many people asked for programs, resources and multi-modal learning opportunities to be provided at diocesan, deanery, parish, home, and individual levels. Respondents suggested a variety of kinds of formation: religious education in Catholic schools, catechetical programs, scripture study, theological education, Catholic social teaching, spiritual direction, sacramental preparation programs, adult faith formation, youth and young adult programs, service-learning, online options and small group settings.

Other responses included the promotion of commitment to prayer, experiencing different spiritual practices in the Christian tradition, and offering new opportunities to engage with and promote praying the rosary and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Some respondents spoke about their experience of a particular devotion, spirituality, or community and their desire for others to know about them.

Questions to Consider:

How might we better support Catholics to grow in a mature faith that enables them to both understand Church teaching and apply this knowledge wisely to their lives and decisions?

What have you experienced or are you aware of that provides adult faith formation in areas such as scripture, moral theology, Church social and ecological teaching, liturgy and mission to the world?

How might we become a more contemplative people, committing more deeply to prayer as a way of life?

What opportunities are you aware of for nurturing spiritual development and learning about and participating in prayer practices?

Which of these faith formation and spiritual development opportunities do you believe would be of most value for the archdiocese to establish and/ or promote if existing? What could be the benefits for our Church communities of increasing access to these programs.

Theme Four: Parish life and Liturgy

Overarching Questions:

How do we empower the faithful to live out their Baptism as disciples of Jesus called to the table of the Lord, the altar of sacrifice?

How do we become a participatory church where parishes, schools, movements and organisations recognise that every person brings unique graces and gifts, and that all persons contribute to building the Body of Christ?

From the Consultations:

Parish and community life were of great concern to people as these are the primary references of church for most people. Many people asked the questions, “Why are people no longer attending Mass” and “How can we become and more welcoming and inclusive church?” Some people expressed concern and sadness at the decreasing number of people involved in parish life in the wake of the pandemic. Others offered suggestions for improving community life by developing more contemporary liturgies, offering programs and activities for children, families and young people, building stronger relationships between schools and parishes, and engaging in the wider community outside the church walls. Several people mentioned the growing cultural diversity of the Archdiocese as both a gift and a challenge.

People were concerned about church finances, upkeep of buildings and properties, employment of parish workers, regional communities, and finding new leaders and volunteers.

Liturgy was also a significant theme for many people. Some are looking for new and inclusive language for readings and prayers, others are advocating that more traditional forms of the liturgy, such as the Latin Mass, be promoted. Respondents were divided on how Mass should be celebrated (contemporary or traditional), what music is appropriate and what would attract non-church-goers to Mass, especially young people. Many indicated that homilies need better preparation and should reflect the assembly in the light of the readings.

Questions for Consideration:

In your experience what attitudes and behaviours in your parish have contributed to a sense of belonging and building a community that supports people in their life situations?

What does a welcoming and inclusive community look like? How might our parishes, schools and services provide Christian hospitality?

What roles in parishes are needed, or would be helpful for building parish and community life?

How might we better embrace the diverse liturgical traditions of the Churches which make up the Catholic Church and the cultural gifts of indigenous and immigrant communities to enrich the spirituality and worship of the Church in Australia?

How might liturgical language, ritual and practice better reflect the lives of our people?

What kinds of leadership would you like the Archdiocese to provide about the celebration of the Mass and Sacraments? Would guidelines about some of these aspects of liturgy be helpful to parishes? If so, which ones are most important?

Theme Five: A Church that hears and responds to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.

Overarching Question:

How do we become a more outward facing Church connecting with issues of local and global concern?

From the Consultations:

People are concerned about the role of the church in responding to various crises facing the poor and vulnerable, locally and globally. There were significant responses seeking leadership in the area of climate change and working to end poverty and homelessness. Others asked how the Archdiocese can lead in areas of social and political topics (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, refugees and migrants, and reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples), and defend the rights of the most vulnerable in society. People are looking for opportunities to engage in action and advocacy for social justice.

Many want to see greater collaboration with other Christian denominations and organisations as well as expanded opportunities for ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue. There is little knowledge of the work the Archdiocesan ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue groups.

Questions to consider:

How might the Church in Australia respond to the call to 'ecological conversion'? How can we express and promote a commitment to an 'integral ecology of life' in all its dimensions, with particular attention to the more vulnerable people and environments in our country and region?

What kinds of action would you like to see the Archdiocese take in the areas of ecological and social justice, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue?

How best can the Catholic Church in Adelaide demonstrate leadership in tackling issues of justice, ethics and morality?

What kinds of advocacy are most likely to be effective?

Theme Six: Outreach and Accompaniment of Children, Families and Young people

Overarching Question:

How do we become a church that goes out to meet children, families and young people wherever they are, responds to their needs, and engages in ongoing accompaniment with them in safe and supportive communities?

From the Consultations:

Many people asked the questions, “where are our young people? How can we bring them back to church?” Others asked, “how can we support young people, children and their families?” Some people are asking for advice for outreach and engagement with young people, others look to young people as a solution to diminishing Mass attendance, but they do not know how to attract them. Many are wondering how to support parents of young children and strengthen family life. How can communities welcome and support families, children and young people?

Young people under the age of 30 asked for mental health support, for the parish community to be open to the ideas and leadership from young people, opportunities to connect and serve in the community, and they are asking for guidance and accompaniment from elders. People also asked for communities to be more supportive of families, to engage children through programs and activities, and offer age-appropriate faith formation and liturgies.

Several respondents called for a re-commitment to providing safe environments for young people in our parishes, schools and communities.

Questions to consider

What does it mean to be a missionary church, an outward facing church, in regard to children, families and young people?

How might the diocese and parishes better support families with young children? How do we learn what these families would find nurturing and helpful?

How might the church engage more meaningfully with young people to enable them to find a ‘place to belong’?

How do we allow the insights, challenges and experiences of young people, children and families to inform and influence our church – parishes, schools, communities and services?

What particular approaches need to be strengthened and supported to develop youth leadership as an integral part of Church leadership?

What would it look like to provide inter-generational accompaniment in our communities? How are the young and the elderly looked after together?