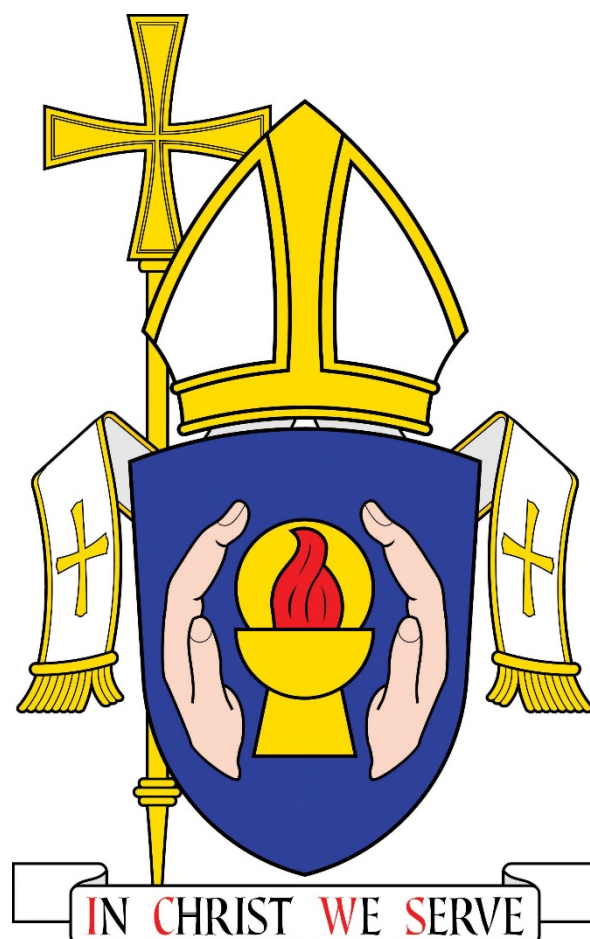


Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton

**Diocesan Assembly
28-30 March 2019**



Pre-Reading Materials

Dear Delegate

Thank you for accepting the invitation to participate in the Diocesan Assembly. This is your Pre-reading pack and it is offered to assist you in your preparation for the Assembly.



Background

The Diocesan Assembly is the culmination of the Listening Sessions undertaken across the Diocese in 2017 and 2018. These were very productive meetings and I felt privileged to be able to hear your stories and insights. From these listening sessions, feedback was collated by Sr Noreen Dunne into those matters that were regional, Diocesan and matter for the Church of Australia (or universal). These latter matters will go forward to the Plenary Council to be convened in 2020.

Your participation

You are a delegate to this Assembly because you attended one or both of the Listening Sessions. While you do not represent your parish or region i.e. promoting or advocating for the interests of your region; you are asked to bring your own experience, wisdom and your knowledge of the Diocese as it is manifested in your region to the discussions.

This Diocesan Assembly will now tackle those matters of a Diocesan nature that emerged i.e. those matters that can only be dealt with at a Diocesan level. The Diocesan Assembly will work towards making propositions for us to undertake God's mission here in the Diocese of Rockhampton over the next 10 years. Essentially, our process is to read the 'signs of the times' in our own Diocese and discern how we can undertake the mission. It is my hope that by the end of 2019 a Diocesan Pastoral Council will be established with the task of developing and implementing a Diocesan Pastoral Plan based on the propositions that we generate in these next few days.

To prepare, you are asked to read the papers in this booklet and write your reflections, insights and reactions so that you can effectively contribute to the discussions. It is important that we take forward the topics – not just go over what we already know – so that we can take genuine action. as we move through the next 10 years. Perhaps read one or two articles a day and sit with them and reflect on 'what is the reading suggesting to me about our mission as a Diocese?'

I look forward to this exciting time in the history of our Diocese, and the next steps that will follow. Again, I thank you for your willingness to give your time and energy to this process.

Yours sincerely

+ Michael

Section One

This section reiterates some of the material presented by Bishop Michael at the Regional Gatherings. They serve as a focus for our purpose now as a Diocese.

The Church is the living body of Christ in which all share in various and diverse ways the responsibility for the mission given to the Church by the Lord to:

- Worship God in joyous celebration of the Mass and sacraments
- Proclaim the Word of God to all people
- Witness the love and redemptive healing of Christ
- Serve those in need in both Church and society

Four of the basic elements of this mission may be described as:

- *proclaiming* the good news of God's love throughout the world
- *inviting* more and more people into the community of disciples
- *sanctifying* by encouraging the whole community of faith to grow in holiness, especially as a worshipping community through intimate connectedness with the source and summit of the Christian Life, the Eucharist.
- *transforming* the world until justice, love and peace prevail.

The essential mission each person baptized in the name of Father Son and Holy Spirit was named as *evangelization* by Pope John Paul II for the millennium that dawned in 2000. By

- proclaiming WORD,
- offering prayerful WORSHIP,
- forming a COMMUNITY of faith,
- giving ourselves in SERVICE of others,
- exercising STEWARDSHIP over all God's gifts, and
- providing collaborative LEADERSHIP to the Parish across these dimensions of its life.

The essential mission of every Catholic Parish is evangelization: that is, proclaiming and witnessing to the Good News of the Gospel by enacting the life of Christ, who came "that they may have life to the full" [Jn 10:10].

For Reflection

What are your initial thoughts about the value of a Diocesan Assembly at this time?

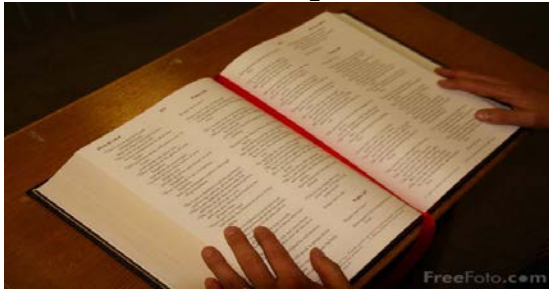
What special gifts of the Spirit are evident in this Diocese at the current time?

How has God graced us in this vast Diocese?



Section Two

Some words from scripture



"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (Matt:28:19)

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. (Mark:16:15)

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." (Luke 5:4)

and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:38)

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." (John: 20:21)

"but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.' "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, And return and be healed." (Isaiah 6:8-10)

And He called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing. And He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, neither a staff, nor a bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not even have two tunics apiece. "Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that city. "And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." Departing, they began going throughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. (Luke 9:1-6)

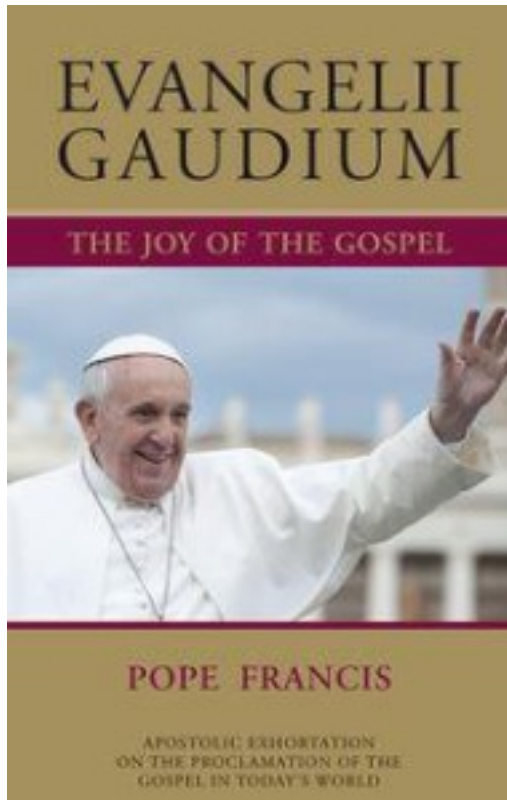
Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)

For Reflection

What themes from these scripture passages emerge for you?

How might they inform your contribution to the Diocesan Assembly?

Section Three
From Pope Francis
Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)



“The Joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come” (#1) (italics mine).

“I dream of a 'missionary option', that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (#27).

“In catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the centre of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal... On the lips of the catechist the first

proclamation must ring out over and over: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you” (#164).

“It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment” (#164).

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord” (#3).

“Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (#9).

“In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization” (#120).

“What I would like to propose is something much more in the line of an evangelical discernment. It is the approach of a missionary disciple, an approach ‘nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit’” (#51).

“The Church is herself a missionary disciple” (#40).

“In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented” (#28)

In some people we see an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church’s prestige, but without any concern that the Gospel have a real impact on God’s faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time” (#95).

We know that “evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man’s concrete life, both personal and social” (#181).

Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society (#187).

Inspired by this, the Church has made an option for the poor which is understood as a “special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness” (#198).

“God’s heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself 'became poor' (2 Cor 8:9). The entire history of our redemption is marked by the presence of the poor. Salvation came to us from the 'yes' uttered by a lowly maiden from a small town on the fringes of a great empire.” (#197)

“Without the preferential option for the poor, ‘the proclamation of the Gospel, which is itself the prime form of charity, risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today’s society of mass communications’” (#199)

“Countless issues involving evangelization today might be discussed here, but I have chosen not to explore these many questions which call for further reflection and study. Nor do I believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound 'decentralization’” (#16).

“Sometimes we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met. To some extent this is because our 'technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy’” (#7).

In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded.” (#23).

“God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us” (#12).

“The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance: it is a grace which we constantly need to implore. The apostles never forgot the moment when Jesus touched their hearts: 'It was about four o'clock in the afternoon'" (Jn. 1:39) (#13).

“Evangelization consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time” (#24).

“The disciple is ready to put his or her whole life on the line, even to accepting martyrdom, in bearing witness to Jesus Christ, yet the goal is not to make enemies but to see God’s word accepted and its capacity for liberation and renewal revealed” (24).

“Instead, we waste time talking about 'what needs to be done' – in Spanish we call this the sin of 'habriaqueísmo' – like spiritual masters and pastoral experts who give instructions from on high. We indulge in endless fantasies and we lose contact with the real lives and difficulties of our people” (#96).

“To be evangelizers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people’s lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy. To be Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people” (#268).

“It is striking that even some who clearly have solid doctrinal and spiritual convictions frequently fall into a lifestyle which leads to an attachment to financial security, or to a desire for power or human glory at all cost, rather than giving their lives to others in mission. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary enthusiasm!” (#80)

Some fall into it because they throw themselves into unrealistic projects and are not satisfied simply to do what they reasonably can. Others, because they lack the patience to allow processes to mature; they want everything to fall from heaven. Others, because they are attached to a few projects or vain dreams of success. Others, because they have lost real contact with people and so depersonalize their work that they are more concerned with the road map than with the journey itself (#82).

“Demands that the legitimate rights of women be respected, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity, present the Church with profound and challenging questions which cannot be lightly evaded. The reservation of the priesthood to males, as a sign of Christ the Spouse who gives himself in the Eucharist, is not a question open to discussion, but it can prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general.” (#104)

“I call on theologians to carry out this service as part of the Church’s saving mission. In doing so, however, they must always remember that the Church and theology exist to evangelize, and not be content with a desk-bound theology. Universities are outstanding environments for articulating and developing this evangelizing commitment in an interdisciplinary and integrated way” (#134).

“The bishop must always foster this missionary communion in his diocesan Church, following the ideal of the first Christian communities, in which the believers were of one heart and one soul (cf. Acts 4:32). To do so, he will sometimes go before his people, pointing the way and keeping their hope vibrant. At other times, he will simply be in their midst with his unassuming and merciful presence” (#31).

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html



Opening of Synod on Young people, the Faith and Vocational Discernment Pope Francis
October 3, 2018

“The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things” (Jn 14:26). In this straightforward way, Jesus offers his disciples the assurance that will accompany all the missionary work to be entrusted to them: the Holy Spirit will be the first to preserve, to keep alive and relevant, the memory of the Lord in the heart of his disciples. It is the Spirit who ensures that the richness and beauty of the Gospel will be a source of constant joy...

At the start of this moment of grace for the whole Church, and following God’s word, we ask the Paraclete to help us preserve the memory of the Lord and rekindle in us his words that have made our hearts burn (cf. Lk24:32)... A memory that can rekindle and renew in us the *capacity to dream and to hope*. For we know that our young people will be capable of prophesy and vision to the extent that we, who are already adult or elderly, can dream and thus be infectious in sharing those dreams and hopes that we carry in our hearts (cf. Joel 2:28).

May the Spirit grant us the grace to be synodal... anointed with the gift of dreaming and of hoping. We will then, in turn, be able to anoint our young people with the gift of prophecy and vision...the grace to be a memory that is diligent, living and effective, that does not allow itself from one generation to the next to be extinguished or crushed by the prophets of doom and misfortune, by our own shortcomings, mistakes and sins. Rather may it be a memory capable of enkindling our hearts and of discerning the ways of the Spirit. With this attitude of docile listening to the voice of the Spirit, we have gathered from all parts of the world....

Anointed by hope, let us begin a new ecclesial meeting. One that can broaden our horizons, expand our hearts and transform those frames of mind that today paralyze, separate and alienate us from young people, leaving them ...orphans without a faith community that should sustain them, orphans devoid of a sense of direction and meaning in life (*Evang. Gaudium*, 49).

Hope challenges us, moves us and shatters that conformism which says, “it’s always been done like this”. Hope asks us to get up and look directly into the eyes of young people and see their situations. This same hope asks us to make efforts to reverse situations of uncertainty, exclusion and violence, to which our young people are exposed.... (Young People)...demand of us a creative dedication, a dynamism which is intelligent, enthusiastic and full of hope....

This capacity to dream together that our Lord offers the Church today as a gift, requires... that we cultivate one specific attitude: “Let each of you look not only to his own interests,

but also to the interests of others” (*Phil 2:4*)...In this spirit we will try to listen to one another, in order to discern together what the Lord is asking of his Church... this demands that we be really careful against succumbing to self-preservation and self-centredness which gives importance to what is secondary yet makes secondary what is important. Love for the Gospel and for the people...challenges us to broaden our horizons and not lose sight of the mission to which we are called...that will benefit us all. Without this... all of our efforts will be in vain.

The gift of that ability to listen, sincerely and prayerfully, as free as possible from prejudice and conditioning, will help us to be part of those situations which the People of God experience. Listening to God, so that with him we can listen to the cry of the people; listening to our people, so that we can breathe in with them the desire to which God calls us (cf. *Address during the Prayer Vigil in preparation for the Synod on the Family*, 4 October 2014). This disposition protects us from the temptation of falling into moralistic or elitist postures, and it protects us from the lure of abstract ideologies that never touch the realities of our people.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us entrust this time to the maternal protection of Our Lady. May she, the woman who listens and cherishes memories, accompany us in recognizing the signs of the Spirit, so that with a sense of urgency (cf. *Lk 1:39*), with our dreams and hopes, we may accompany and encourage our young people to always continue prophesying.

And at the end of the Synod on Young people, the Faith and Vocational Discernment, Pope Francis had this to say...

To you, young people, who have spoken, who have given your testimony, who have taken a path, I say: this is the first response. Take your path. Be young people on the move, who look to the horizons, not in the mirror. Always looking forward, on the move, and not sitting on the couch. Many times I have thought to say this: a young person, a boy, a girl, who is on the couch, ends up retired at 24: this is terrible! And then, you said it well: that what helps me find myself is not the mirror, looking at my appearance. Finding myself is in doing, in going in search of good, of truth, of beauty. There I will find myself.

Then, on this path, another word that struck me is the last one. That last word was powerful, but it is true.... Who said it? You. It was powerful: coherence. Coherence in life. I am on a journey, but with coherence in life. And when you see an incoherent Church, a Church that reads you the Beatitudes and then falls into the most princely and scandalous clericalism, I understand, I understand.... If you are Christian, take the Beatitudes and put them into practice. And if you are a man or a woman who has given your life, consecrated it; if you are a priest — even a dancing priest [referring to a testimony] —, if you are a priest and want to live as a Christian, follow the path of the Beatitudes. Not the way of worldliness, the way of clericalism, which is one of the most awful perversions of the Church. Coherence in life. But you, too [addressing the young people], must be coherent on your path and ask yourselves: “Am I coherent in my life?”. This is a second principle. This is a second principle.

Then there is the problem of inequalities. We lose the true sense of power — this applies to the question about politics — we lose what Jesus told us, that power is service: true power is serving. Otherwise it is selfishness; it is humiliating the other, not allowing him to grow. It is controlling, making slaves, not mature people. Power is for helping people grow, for making

ourselves servants of the people. This is the principle: regarding both politics and coherence in your questions.

Then, other questions.... I will tell you something. Please, you young people, boys and girls, you are priceless! You are not a commodity at auction! Please do not let yourselves be bought; do not let yourselves be seduced; do not let yourselves be enslaved by the ideological colonizations that put ideas in our heads and in the end we become slaves, dependent, failures in life. You are priceless. You must always repeat this to yourselves: I am not at auction, I am priceless. I am free, I am free! Fall in love with this freedom, which is what Jesus offers.

Then there are two things — and I would like to end with this — among the ideas that you have said and to which the Synod Fathers will respond in dialogue with your questions. The first is on the use of the web. It is true: the digital interconnection is immediate, it is effective, it is rapid. But if you get used to this, you will end up — and what I am about to say is real — you will end up like a family where, at the table, at lunch or dinner, everyone is on their mobile phone and talks with other people, or communicates with each other by mobile phone, without a concrete, actual relationship, lacking concreteness. To be reliable, every path you take must be concrete, like the experiences, so many experiences that you have mentioned here. None of the testimonies that you have given today were ‘liquid’: all were concrete. Concreteness. Concreteness is the guarantee for moving forward. If the media, if the use of the web leads you away from concreteness, makes you ‘liquid’, cut it out. Cut it out. Because if there is no concreteness there will be no future for you. This is certain; it is a rule of the road and of the journey.

And then, this concreteness also in welcoming. So many of your examples, which you have given today, are about welcoming. Michel asked this question: “How can we overcome the increasingly widespread mentality that sees in the foreigner, in the different, in the migrant, a danger, a harm, an enemy to be chased away?”. This is the mentality of exploiting people, of making slaves of the weakest. It is about closing not only doors, but also closing hands. And today populism — which has nothing to do with what is popular — is somewhat in fashion. Popular is the culture of the people, the culture of each of your peoples which is expressed in art; it is expressed in culture; it is expressed in the science of the people; it is expressed in celebration! Every people celebrates in their own way. This is popular. But populism is the opposite: it is being closed to this based on a model. We are closed, there is only us. And when we are closed we cannot move forward. Be careful. It is the mentality that Michel spoke of: “How can we overcome the increasingly widespread mentality that sees in the foreigner, in the different, in the migrant a danger, a harm, a danger to be chased away?”. It is overcome with an embrace, by welcoming, with dialogue, with love which is the word that opens all doors.

And in the end — I spoke of concreteness — each of you wants to take the concrete path in life, a path that bears fruit. Thank you [Giovanni Caccamo] for the photo with your grandfather: that photograph was perhaps this evening’s most beautiful message. Speak with the elderly, talk to grandparents: they are the roots, the roots of your concreteness, the roots of your growing, blossoming and bearing fruit. Remember: if the tree is by itself, it will not bear fruit. All that blossoms on the tree comes from what is underground. This expression is from a poet, it is not mine. But it is the truth. Stick to the roots, but do not remain there. Take the roots and bring them forth to bear fruit, and you too will become roots for others.

Do not forget about the photograph, the one with grandfather. Talk to your grandparents; talk to the elderly and this will make you happy.

Thank you very much! These are guidelines. The responses are up to them! [indicating the Synod Fathers]. Thank you, thank you!



For Reflection:

Choose five (5) topics that emerge from Pope Francis' words that you believe this Diocese needs to consider as we discern the path for the future.

Section Four

From an Australian Theologian



Realising the dream of Vatican II

by Fr Noel Connolly SSC

Earlier this year, I read an excellent book, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II, Pope Francis and the Renewal of Catholicism*, by Richard Gaillardetz. In it, he compares the pillars of the pre-Vatican II Church with the new pillars of a Vatican II Church.

Before the Council, faith was understood primarily as believing in doctrine – a number of propositions or truths that the hierarchy taught to the laity, who obediently believed without contributing anything. At Vatican II, the bishops returned to the traditional understanding of faith. God reveals himself to us, inviting us into a personal relationship.

Through faith we come to know not things about God, but God's own self – in a personal, relational way.

Since all Christians personally know God, all have the sense of the faith that Pope Francis keeps reminding us of. All can contribute to the teaching role of the Church. Certainly, the official teachers need to listen to the sense of the faithful before teaching.

This understanding of a shared sense of the faith also leads to one of the strongest themes of Vatican II: dialogue.

Following on from Vatican I, the Church became more papal-centred. This was something the bishops at the Second Vatican Council wanted to balance. The bishops fought strongly for a say, especially about matters the Curia was deciding without reference to them. They wanted a collegial Church.

Collegiality was accepted in principle at the Council but has waxed and waned since. It is still developing and maturing in practice. Witness the changes Pope Francis is making to the understanding and practice of the Synod of Bishops, all in the interest of making them more collegial, and not just consultative.

Collegiality, strictly speaking, refers to bishops, "with and under Peter". But it is informed by "synodality", which includes the whole people of God, all of us journeying together, serving each other and listening to one another and in that way to the Holy Spirit.

A final pillar of the pre-Vatican II Church was an emphasis on a sacral priesthood. Clerics were seen as special, separate from the rest of the people of God, superior in holiness and knowledge, the sole and indispensable channels of God's grace, gifts and leadership.

At Vatican II, the priority is given to Baptism, not Holy Orders. The most fundamental Christian calling is Baptism, and all the baptised share in Christ's prophetic, priestly and kingly offices. (Lumen Gentium, 10-13)

<http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/TalkTheologyV10.pdf>

We need a missionary Church, rather than a perfect Church

by Fr Noel Connolly SSC

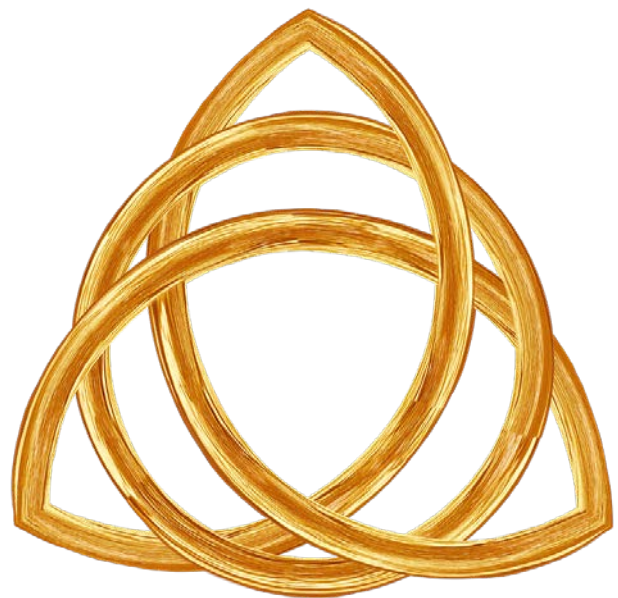
My hope is that we can build a Church in which lay men and especially women can play their rightful role in the ministry and governance of the Church, and where we can learn to trust one another – bishops and all the people of God.

But in recent weeks I have been giving more thought to the question posed for the Council: “What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?” The question refers to Australia, not to the Church. The Plenary Council is not just for our Church, but for our country. Even if we were to come up with a transformed Church, if the country does not benefit, we will have “failed”. We will have failed because we will have failed to be Church.

Pope Francis keeps reminding us to stop being preoccupied with ourselves and to go out into the streets as missionary disciples prepared to get dirty and bruised. There we will find renewal and transformation. We must remember that the goal of mission is not primarily about the expansion or perfection of the Church, but the revelation of God's love and the realisation of God's liberating plan for the universe. It is a plan for a “Kingdom” larger than the Church.

This revolution in understanding mission came at Vatican II, when the bishops realised that mission flows directly from the nature of God – a loving community of three persons whose love gives birth to the universe much the same as parents' love gives birth to children. And, like parents, the Trinity continues to love creation wanting to draw it into their life. It is God's mission.

Mission is God's project and we are not the main actors. The Church is neither the starting point nor the end point, but rather the servant and sacrament of God's mission. The three persons of the Trinity are constantly creating, healing, reconciling, transforming and uniting the world. We are invited to participate in God's life in the world.



The majority of “kingdom good” done in the world today will not be done by Catholics or even Christians. It will be done by people of good will, including our secular brother and sister Australians. God is present wherever men and women strive for justice, peace, freedom and reconciliation between peoples, cultures and religions. Our task is not only to strive for the Kingdom but also to seek out, uncover, encourage, celebrate and build on the

Spirit's activity in Australia. To recognise this good requires humility, closeness, listening and discernment – the very things Pope Francis stresses.

We have much to gain from secular Australia. We can learn a lot about transparency, accountability, participation, the involvement of women, consultation and so forth. In going out, we may also be refreshed by what we learn of God and of the Gospel because we can be confident that God is present and working even in secular and plural Australia. We have much to give and to learn.

“We are challenged to be people of depth, attentive to what is happening around us and spiritually alert.” According to Pope Francis those things are more likely to convert and renew us than a forensic examination and reform of the Church.

This article was first published in the Columban e-Bulletin.

Have we too much in our heads to hear the Holy Spirit?

Fr Noel Connolly, Apr 18, 2018

One of my favourite books in the New Testament is the Acts of the Apostles...It is the story of how the church began. They were challenging times for the apostles and disciples. Although they believed Jesus had risen they only slowly realised that Jesus was not going to return immediately. They were on their own and suddenly responsible for the future of the community. What were they to do? Where were they to go? How were they to relate to the Gentiles? What did it mean to be and live as a Christian?



In the Acts of the Apostles it is the Spirit that plays the major role in converting, empowering and guiding the early Christians. The Spirit emboldens them at Pentecost (Acts 2), who strengthens Stephen at his martyrdom (Acts 7) and who tells Philip to “get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza” and there talk with the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8). In Acts 10 & 11 we learn how the Spirit told Peter to go to Cornelius’ house and to baptize Cornelius because he had received the same Spirit. Later the Spirit helps the community in Antioch to choose Paul and Barnabas and send them off on a mission to Asia Minor [Acts 13]; the same Spirit will prevent Paul from speaking further in Asia and through the appearance of the

Macedonian man in a dream invites him to go to Macedonia to preach. When the community was conflicted over whether the Gentile Christians had to be circumcised their conclusion at the Council of Jerusalem was “We and the Holy Spirit have agreed” (Acts 15, 28) I admire the audacity and the confidence of that statement. Finally, in Acts 19 the Spirit encourages Paul to go up to Jerusalem, where he was to begin his trip to Rome and eventually to his death.

The Acts of the Apostles is a book of searching and in their searching the early Christians relied almost solely on the Spirit. They seemed to look to the Spirit in all their decisions and crises. For some time, I wondered why always and only the Spirit? Until I realized that they had nothing else. The early Christians could not rely on the past and they didn't have clear instructions from Jesus. They didn't even have Paul's Epistles or the Gospels which were yet to be written. They had to read the signs of the times and trust in the Spirit.

In some respects, I envy them and their appreciation of and confidence in the Spirit. I suspect we have too much in our heads to be forced back on the Spirit. We have the Gospels, the Scriptures, our tradition, popes, bishops, theologians and libraries of books and we have developed the habit of looking elsewhere than the Spirit.

Clearly, we cannot empty our minds of all we have learnt and especially of the Gospels and our Christian tradition, but it would be good if we were to pause in silence and try to listen to and rely on the Spirit to guide and empower us. Unfortunately, there tends to be too much rationality, information and talk in our modern Western world and our minds are busy, noisy and distracted.

Also, we Christians are great believers in teaching or education. When in doubt we publish a catechism or another book. We often feel that if we could only explain something better, then people would understand and believe. But we neglect mystery and especially knowing the mystery that is within us and which ultimately nourishes us.

We are living at a time when the old certainties have been eroded and the new solutions are not yet convincing. Many are struggling to find out what God is asking of them. This is not unlike the situation the early Christians faced in the Acts of the Apostles. It was also a book of searching. The early Christians could not rely on the past. They had few traditions, no Christian scriptures and no established institutions or structures of authority. All they could rely on was their faith in Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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For Reflection:

As you consider the importance of the Diocesan Assembly for the future of the Diocese, what themes or messages emerge for you from the writings of Fr Noel Connolly.

Use this page to note any further insights you have as we approach the Diocesan Assembly.