

MISSION AND OUTREACH

**The Church of Maitland-Newcastle is centred on Christ, the Cornerstone,
and seeks always to live as a community of people
who reach out and serve**

In the pages that follow we explore the first 'Foundation' of our life and mission as the church of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

Our Story takes us to the source of our identity in the early church where Jesus disciples were described as sharing their resources and caring for all those in need.

Foundational Statements remind us of what should characterise communities who are committed to Jesus' mission of taking to the whole world the Good News of God's love.

Concerns summarise the issues raised by diocesan respondents to the Plenary Council Listening and Dialogue Session as well as those who submitted written responses at the first session of our Diocesan Synod in November 2019.

Recommendations suggest what could be done to address the issues raised in the preceding section. In many cases they will involve personal and communal conversion and/or actions at local community level.

*Sometimes, I speak of the Church as if it were a field hospital.
It's true: there are many, many wounded!
So many people need their wounds healed!
This is the mission of the Church: to heal the wounds of the heart,
to open doors, to free people, to say that God is good, God forgives all,
God is the Father, God is affectionate, God always waits for us.
... we have to help and create organizations that help in this:
yes, because the Lord gives us the gifts for this.
But when we forget this mission, forget poverty, forget the apostolic zeal
and instead, place our hope in these human means,
the Church slowly slips into becoming an NGO,
it becomes a beautiful organization: powerful, but not evangelical,
because it lacks that spirit, that poverty, that power to heal".*

Pope Francis Homily Feb 2015

OUR STORY

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit thrust the apostles out of a small room. They evangelised, proclaiming Christ's death and resurrection, bringing many to discipleship in the new-born Christian community.

They kept on testifying to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power, with the result that 'the numbers of men and women who came to believe in the Lord increased steadily.'

One of their first acts addressed a scandal within. Certain widows were neglected and starving. The infant community reached out to them, appointing seven 'deacons' to care for their needs

Two of the seven are reported immediately on mission, unable to be constrained to table service. They boldly and effectively declared the message near and far. Philip, 'proclaimed the Good News in every town as far as Caesarea'. 'The word of God continued to spread and to gain followers.'

Peter, compelled by the Holy Spirit, preached to pagans — the Roman centurion, Cornelius, and his household — and had them baptised in the name of Jesus Christ.

Paul, tireless apostle to the gentiles, dominated the mission of the early church. 'Woe to me if I do not tell the good news' he would say. 'The love of Christ compels me.' His missionary outreach extended to Rome. The commission to make disciples of all the nations was symbolically fulfilled.

God's mission of love was embodied in his Son. Jesus' mission to all is embodied in his Church.

The coming of Christ's church to the first-nation people of the Hunter and the Manning two hundred years ago was not the good news Christ would have it be. Dispossession and dehumanising was the norm. Little effort was made to evangelise or reach out in a humane or Christian way.

With the passing of time outreach in charity and justice has been the prominent face of mission. It found expression in the corporal works of mercy, in educating the poor and caring for the sick and suffering. It was an evangelisation based on actions speaking louder than words.

Today our diocese evangelises through the good works of the St Vincent de Paul Society; through outreach to the needy by CatholicCare; through care of the sick, the elderly, the dying, in hospitals, nursing homes and hospice. It evangelises through chaplaincies to seafarers and prisoners.

Perhaps most effective is the evangelisation by those who live their faith attractively in everyday encounters and dare to personally accompany seekers on their journey. Good listening, along with words and deeds of understanding, acceptance and affirmation, are Good News to those in need.

Evangelisation is a work of attraction. It draws people to Jesus the way he did — by compelling personal integrity and caring manner, by a vision of wholeness matching the longings of the heart. Joyful and grateful disciples, we can bring others to Jesus in the embrace of his community.

FOUNDATIONAL STATEMENTS

We regard every individual as having equal dignity and worth and because we believe that the Spirit is at work throughout the world, we respect those whose beliefs differ from our own.

If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance...a problem for politicians to sort out, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can respond with faith and charity, and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own ... an image of God. (Pope Francis *Rejoice and Be Glad* 98).

Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless his people. (St Teresa of Avila 1515-1582).

We acknowledge and seek to be enriched by the history and wisdom of Indigenous peoples while acknowledging that reconciliation for past injustices remains a goal rather than an achievement.

The Church in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others. (Pope John Paul II speaking to Aboriginal people in 1986 NT).

To achieve an authentic Catholic Church in Australia, the gifts of perseverance, culture and spirituality of First Nations Catholics should be fully embraced. This goal can be achieved through education, participation in decision-making and a comprehensive commitment to fostering mutual respect between First Nations and non-Indigenous Catholics: (*The Light from the Southern Cross* p 74)

Because we believe that the Spirit is at work throughout the world, we respect those whose beliefs differ from our own, and seek to deepen our bonds with them.

The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are willed by God in his wisdom, through which he created human beings. (From a document on human fraternity signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb).

The strength of what unites all of us as Christians is supremely important. We can be so attentive to what divides us that at times we no longer appreciate or value what unites us. (Pope Francis, *Beloved Amazon* 108).

We acknowledge all we have and enjoy as gifts from God and accept the responsibility to care for, nurture and share those gifts.

Given the state of our planet, given the climate change we already experience, given the devastating loss of species, given the terrible burden of ecological disaster on the poorest people of earth, I think Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* may well be the most important church document of the twenty-first century. (Denis Edwards, *Deep Incarnation: God's Redemptive Suffering with Creatures*, 2019, p 128).

CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION: PUTTING GOSPEL VALUES IN ACTION

What we heard:

- *Need to reduce margins between rich and poor*
- *..to care for Creation*
- *..to defend religious freedom*
- *..to defend the right to life*
- *..to fight for human rights*
- *..to live in peace and harmony*

What we recommend:

MO 1.1 That evangelisation be given priority through setting a vision and broad strategy within our diocese, appropriately resourced with funds and personnel.

MO 1.2 That any missionary or outreach activity be grounded in a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and the desire to build genuine relationships within our communities.

2. SOCIAL ISSUES

What we heard:

- *Need for a unified voice at diocesan and parish level in engaging with social issues*
- *Look at ways of raising awareness about significant social issues*
- *for solidarity and sharing with the poor, the disadvantaged, the hurt, the needy*
- *for collaboration at the local level with other social justice minded groups*
- *for concern for volunteers: caring for them, acknowledging and affirming their work*
- *for rural Australians suffering bushfires, droughts, isolation, and mental health issues*
- *for same-sex-attracted persons and the end of discrimination of LGBTIQ people*

What we recommend:

MO 2.1 That in the spirit of the vision of *Many Parts One Body One Mission* we explore how we can create localised collaborative hubs that would provide a holistic caring response to social needs.

MO 2.2 That national and diocesan structures research and advocate on matters of social justice, working in dialogue with others across society as well as with all parts of the Church.

Re CARE OF CREATION

MO 2.3 That our diocesan community recognises the importance of integral ecology and ecological conversion articulated in *Laudato Si* and other Catholic Social Teaching.

MO 2.4 That across the diocese we connect with the diverse community environmental groups and participate in activities supporting education, research, and advocacy around the environment.

MO 2.5 That the diocese reviews our environmental footprint and impact with a view to educating, reporting, improving, leading, and modelling.

3. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

What we heard:

- *Need to be united as a Diocesan community in practical achievable ways to communicate solidarity and practical ongoing support for the needy*
- *to reach out to all the baptised, to families, parents of children in Catholic schools, the disconnected (for whatever reason)*
- *... to youth; providing more youth facilities; more youth programs*
- *... to teachers in Catholic schools to support them in their ministry*
- *... to volunteers, caring for them, acknowledging and affirming their work*
- *... to rural Australians suffering bushfires, droughts, isolation, mental health issues*
- *... to same-sex-attracted persons; end discrimination of LGBTIQ people*
- *... to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*
- *... to Interfaith and other Christian groups*
- *... to the wider community and so be a more visible presence in communities especially at local level*

What we recommend:

Re OUR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

MO 3.1 That our diocese listen to and embrace the spiritual, ecological and cultural wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as important for the health of our diocese.

MO 3.2 That the diocese, in consultation and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Ministry and the wider community, commit to developing tangible mechanisms to embed their rich culture and spirituality in the life of the Church.

Re THOSE OF OTHER CULTURES

MO 3.3 That the diocese acknowledge, welcome, support and embrace the various cultural groups which make up our local Catholic Church.

MO 3.4 That our communities create mutual authentic opportunities for the sharing of cultures.

Re ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS

MO 3.5 That our diocese continues to resource and support the work and outreach of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Council and that parishes are encouraged to connect with other Christian denominations and other Faith traditions in their local areas.

MO 3.6 That the diocese collaborates and stands in solidarity with other faith traditions on social issues.

Re YOUNG PEOPLE

MO 3.7 That we engage with young people, recognising the gifts that young people bring and together reimagine the Church's ministry to young people.

MO 3.8 That parishes be places where young people are welcomed, accompanied, encouraged to lead, supported, and embraced to feel valued and wanted.

MO 3.9 That creative young people's initiatives be investigated across dioceses and with community and faith groups in order to animate young people.

4. CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

- *Recognise what Catholic Church does well: Social Services outreach programs*
- *Tell the story of the reach and impact of our Catholic services – doco that links us all up*
- *Encourage people who are good communicators to speak once a year at every Catholic parish at every Mass re works and volunteer possibilities,*
- *Improve the relationships of people within and between all spaces under the umbrella 'church'*
- *Collaborate between agencies (and provision of funding for starting up such projects)*
- *Connect parishes to Catholic services to support parishes in their growth and change*
- *Christ has been taken out of Catholic Care, St Vincent de Paul, Catholic Schools. Organisations employ a lot of non-Catholics*
- *Formally identify and provide chaplains and churches for "fringe" members of our church – gatherings for homeless, gay, divorced, disabled*

What we recommend:

MO 4.1 That all parts of the Diocese, including service organisations and agencies, deepen their dialogue with each other to ensure that we are all working together and that we celebrate our service to the community as always rooted in the love of God, love of neighbour, generosity of spirit and striving for justice.

MO 4.2 That we tell stories of our mission and outreach through a variety of mediums to effectively promote the quality outcomes of various services in our diocese – education, health, social services, early childhood, aged care.