
What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?

Response by the Gospel & Life Group, St Brigid's Healesville
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What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time? (500 word limit - if you would like to upload additional material, you can do so at the end of the submission)

We are a Gospel & Life group who gather to pray, read Scripture, and to discuss our lives and support each other in this context. We have two key areas which we think that we, as parish, are called to by the Holy Spirit. The first is to love each other. This cannot be a narrow calling because our loving actions ripple out in bigger and bigger waves, often in ways we don't see. The second is to pray. We are called to pray together and in our parish we do this very well. We have many small groups that pray and work together, and we are blessed with wonderful leaders (priest, deacon, pastoral associate) who are very prayerful and loving. However, we feel that our personal lives would be enriched if we could all pay more attention to Jesus during the day. We know that our whole parish, community and town would be even more blessed and attractive to others if we could commit ourselves to prayer. Love and prayer are our gifts from God and we thank God for each other.

What questions do you have about the future of the Church in Australia that you would like the Plenary Council to consider? (500 word limit - if you would like to upload additional material, you can do so at the end of the submission)

Our parish has experienced the catastrophic effects of abusive priests, neglect by our bishops, and a series of administrative priests. We are delighted to currently have a priest who has listened to the people and worked with us towards healing, and supportive of the many other activities that we plan. He is a good and holy man who has been with us for a number of years. How can the Church, and the bishops in particular, better support parishes? How can bishops help build up a parish in a way that is not dependant on only one leader? How can we better care for our priests, and especially work to bring them into the lives of the people? What plan is there to make parishes more resilient, have a healthy understanding of their faith and doctrine, and to build loving and collaborative relationships with each other and the wider community? How can we better recognise and support the mission and discipleship that is already active in lay activities, such as pastoral associates, chaplains, charity work, home visits, care of family, etc? How can women and lay men more fully offer their gifts in the service of Christ and the Church, and have those gifts gladly received? How can bishops hear the voices of their people and be able to better respond to them in love? What can bishops do so that their people can know and love them more?

Would you like to share a story about your experience of faith or of the Church in Australia that has shaped you? (500 word limit - if you would like to upload additional material, you can do so at the end of the submission)

Our parish has an extraordinary gift of hospitality. We know this to be true because we have all experienced it in some way: during bereavement, illness, loneliness, and through many forms of suffering, we know that our parish will care for us in very practical and prayerful ways. Our hospitality is active and includes welcoming and engaging with people. Strangers are welcomed and our youth are celebrated, the Sacraments are happy and inclusive celebrations, and the Church is bursting at funerals. Neither the smallest nor the oldest are forgotten by our care group, pastoral associate, deacon and priest. Our hospitality extends to our families, school and town, and even wider. Our prayer group has remembered one particular event that helped this grace to take root in our parish. After a crisis of abuse a priest came to our people and told them "you people are the Church." In a deeply symbolic move he took down the fence that encircled the presbytery. Those who remember this time say that "everyone did something." It was a hard time, and it still is as we struggle with our past and with how to walk with those who remain hurt, but the Spirit has flourished in the people and parish of St Brigid's Healesville - and we thank God.