



Catholic Social Services
Victoria

...building a more just and compassionate society

What does the Lord require of you? – Micah 6:8

A paper prepared for consideration by Members of the Plenary Council prior to the Second Assembly



March 2022

This Paper was prepared by Catholic Social Services Victoria with generous assistance from our members and supporters

About CSSV

Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) is the peak body for 43 member agencies delivering a wide range of community and social services to over 200,000 people each year across Victoria (a list of our member agencies is at Appendix 3). We are a collaboration between the Bishops of Victoria and our member organisations. Our shared Christian mission is to love and serve our disadvantaged neighbours in the light of the human dignity they bear as persons made in God's image, no matter how difficult, or violent the circumstances they may face. Inspired by Jesus Christ's life, death, healing and teaching ministry, we and our member organisations seek to hear and stand with the poor and marginalised, and to work for a just, equitable, peaceful and compassionate society. Further information about CSSV is available on our [website](#)

Cover Photo: Timothy Schmalz's sculpture, Homeless Jesus, in the courtyard of Newman College, Melbourne.

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Plenary Council First Assembly Proposals and CSSV Recommendations	4
Grounding Ourselves: Catholic Social Teaching and Scripture	8
Conclusion	13
Appendix 1: Summary of Recommendations	15
Appendix 2: The work of the ACBC over time could help inform our future	16
Appendix 3: Catholic Social Services Victoria Member Organisations.....	18

'We want to be a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship, goes forth from its sacristies, in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be the sign of unity... to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation.'

Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* #276

Introduction

The first assembly of the Plenary Council began with the prayers and thoughts of many across Australia. On Friday 1st October 2021, Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) gathered a diverse group of 57 people from across our members and supporters for a morning of prayer for all involved in the process and participation in the Plenary Council, just prior to the beginning of the first assembly. This time was facilitated by Fr Bruce Duncan CSsR and Sr Joan Healy RSJ.

It is in this same spirit of prayerfulness, as the second assembly fast approaches, that CSSV wishes to take this opportunity to again encourage, support and equip members of the Plenary Council to consider some key principles and recommendations that we hope will be formally endorsed and discussed at the upcoming gathering in July 2022.

This paper builds on our previous [open letter](#) to all members of the Plenary Council (22 September 2021) from which we were grateful to receive much positive feedback. It is also in addition to our follow up [statement](#) after the first assembly (19 October 2021), and our initial [submission](#) to the Plenary Council (2018). All submissions have been put together from the reality and context of Catholic social services, and in response to the Gospel imperative to stand with and serve the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised, and to work for a just, equitable and compassionate society.

CSSV continually draws on the knowledge and support of our 43 member organisations when making our recommendations. It is they who accompany and provide services to people who are marginalised by our society, people who have fallen on hard times, and those that suffer in a whole range of ways in our communities here in Victoria and beyond. Our members work across every dimension of social services and beyond as a part of the enactment of the social mission of the Church. They serve those who are made homeless, they provide counselling and mental health supports, assist those involved with the justice system, provide aged care, work with victim/survivors of domestic violence, give material aid and emergency relief to those suffering hardship, they support recovery from substance abuse, they accompany young people to realise their full potential.

With preparations for the July Second Assembly well underway, including development of the key items for discussion and ultimately, decision-making, we offer this document as a chance to reflect and think through the role of the Church in service to the world. The first half of this document responds to some of the small group final reports and other proposals released by the Plenary Council in December 2021 and sets out our recommendations going forward for consideration. The second part pulls together a range of ideas that Pope Francis challenges us to consider, which CSSV takes seriously as a basis for our ongoing work, approach and recommendations.

Ultimately, we're called to be missionary, to be a living sign of God's love and mercy in the world, the tangible hands and feet of Christ among the least of us – this is core to CSSV and our [43 member organisations](#) who, together with thousands of staff and volunteers, serve over 200,000 people in Victoria each year.

We believe the issues and ideas this paper raises, and recommendations offered, are key to the re-imagining and re-positioning of a Church that sees and responds to the face of Christ in the poor, is [outward focussed, as well as inward looking](#), a Church that goes out to the peripheries meeting people where they're at, as well as providing places of welcome and care.

Plenary Council First Assembly Proposals and CSSV Recommendations

CSSV is guided by the example of Jesus and the Gospel principles enshrined in Catholic Social Teaching, including:

- The Dignity of the Human Person and Preference for the Poor
- The Common Good
- Solidarity
- Subsidiarity

CSSV wishes to see a future Church that clearly demonstrates these principles within a setting that resonates with our Australian context and history. Our Australian society continues to emerge, and the Church must also continue to emerge! We, and all Church leaders, can look to the person and role of Saint Mary MacKillop for inspiration. The guidance of Saint Mary MacKillop leads us to open our hearts to all Australians, not just Catholics, and to strive to give everyone a 'fair go'. Charity and Justice go hand in hand, and together, give Hope. The Church has a strong tradition of service to the poor, the asylum seeker and the marginalised.

This Christ-centred work gives life to the dignity of the human person and preference for the poor. The Church and its agencies can, based on principles of Catholic Social Teaching, 'speak truth to power'. Parishes and voluntary groups have been the mainstay of charity. Local efforts benefit from coordination and leadership at diocesan, state and national level to tackle the systemic issues. The Church should have a strong and public advocacy role. This requires ensuring there is strong and capable leadership and resources for state and national Catholic social justice advocacy bodies.

The Church relies on hardworking social service agencies, including voluntary, professional and religious. Many are struggling for survival and to have their voices heard. Increasing Government regulation restricts charitable agencies from a role in advocacy. This constrains efforts towards common good. Recently, national Church advocacy bodies have lost Church funding at a time when we need to be building a capable voice, independent of government. Strong advocacy requires a credible position, research, relationships and communication. The Plenary Council should give specific recognition to underlying generational injustice in Australia.

There are many issues, but a small number of specific areas require concerted action: reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, embracing the multi-cultural and immigrant makeup of society, reinforcing the values of gender equity, working for economic and social equity, and a profound commitment to healing of the land and caring for God's environment — hearing the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor as one. The Common Good demands a public commitment from the Church to action and advocacy on these matters.

In day-to-day ministry, social service agencies work with people in the context of their cultural existence, their trauma and their real-life struggles. To be informed by this wealth of experience would allow us to shape a Church based on their context, that is, an Australian Church. We believe that additional emphasis on these actions will only serve to strengthen the Church within a contemporary cultural context.

Encouragingly, some of these principles and some responses to our initial recommendations from our open letter are evident in the Plenary Council working document released in December 2021, [First Assembly Proposals from Small Groups and Individual Members](#).

The small group that considered **Question One**: ‘personal and communal conversion which mission in Australia requires’ (p8-9) included observations in their final report that ‘listening to the experience and encounter with those on the peripheries (including with those who do not necessarily make us feel comfortable)’ can ‘lead us to a place of conversion’ and ‘encounter Christ’.

This sentiment was linked with an acknowledgement of the need to continue to take action and journey with our Indigenous brothers and sisters, especially in regard to the Uluru Statement of the Heart. An additional consideration by the group was also put forward (p.9) — that attentive further work was to be done on the question of ‘how do we be Church today’ with the group noting that while ‘contemplation and prayer’ was emphasised during the First Assembly, the link between prayer and mission was perhaps ‘missing something’ (p.9) in the discussion at the Plenary Council so far .

Catholic social services live and breathe action on the periphery, encountering Christ-in-the-poor every day – often in challenging and uncomfortable circumstances. If social services were recognised, celebrated and given attention to — as a meaningful vehicle that can facilitate the accompaniment of those who are unwelcomed or marginalised in society — they could be also considered a part of the answer as to ‘how do we be Church today?’ Social services are not the only avenue for meaningful encounter on the peripheries, but they are a distinct place where this activity happens every day.

The small group that considered **Question Three** (p21-25) on ‘Indigenous ways of being Christian’ and learning ‘from the First Nations peoples’ strongly supported NATSICC’s Plenary Council submission, and the Uluru Statement of the Heart amongst other strong work on understanding what an Australian Church may be and look like. The Church has acted quickly on this discussion, with the ACBC endorsing the Statement in November 2021.

Question Four was considered by the whole Plenary Council, and there are neither themes or observations made available in the December document, only proposals for consideration and interventions by individuals. While we are certain that good discussion and prayerful consideration of asking ‘how the Church in Australia might meet the needs of the most vulnerable, go to the peripheries, be missionary in places that may be overlooked or left behind in contemporary Australia and how might we partner with others to do this?’ we again point to the work and experience of Catholic social service agencies and the great potential for further collaboration with other dimensions and structures within the Church. While Catholic social services are working to meet the needs of vulnerable people, they can do it better. But they need to be resourced by a broader body of people and communities working in the same spirit and mission to meet all the dimensions of human need – physical, material, spiritual, systemic. The Church is a body, and the body’s various parts must work together well in order to be healthy.

The single individual intervention published in the section related to **Question Four** (p.28-31) outlines numerous ideas and social issues which deserve further attention – many which are being undertaken in various ways by social services, but would be significantly enhanced by a deliberate and constructive statement and functional approach adopted by the Plenary Council.

On the question of ‘partnership and cooperation’, concrete mechanisms are required to coordinate and connect organisations, communities and agencies. We need to provide spaces for mutual learning and advocacy. Resourced social service peak bodies and their ability to organise forums/engagement with other parts of the body of Christ are, and can be, a solid foundation for further effective partnership and engagement with other ‘Christians, people of other faiths, neighbourhood community groups and government’.

The notes of the discussion regarding **Question Five**, on ‘ecological conversion’, was substantial and it was clear that the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor needs to be understood together. This is the experience of social service organisations – that the poorest in our society disproportionately bear the brunt of extreme weather conditions and a changing climate.

CSSV’s initial recommendations from our open letter to all members of the Plenary Council in 2021’s remain crucial and current. We acknowledge the important work already undertaken by the Plenary Council, which has corresponded with partial implementation of our Recommendation 3, with the endorsement of the Uluru statement by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conferences — an important step of solidarity as we continue on a path to learning and reconciliation.

We again recommend that the structure of the second assembly in July 2022 has an agenda item and corresponding discussion that includes an additional, specific, and explicit focus on the outward-looking theme of **Social Justice and Equity**. Justice and equity speak to our desire to give everyone a ‘fair go’. Charity and justice go hand in hand, and together, give hope. Within this overarching theme, we recommend the following:

1. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) and dioceses should commit to a long-term capability for the church to be a voice for those at the periphery, at state and national levels, for the common good.
2. The '[Parish as Centre of Service](#)' subsidiarity model can be more widely promoted by dioceses.
3. The ACBC and dioceses should express solidarity with Indigenous leadership in the movement towards truth telling, treaty and voice.
4. Plenary Council recommend a new strategic conversation to create a new paradigm of an Australian Catholic Church, guided by the spirit of Saint Mary McKillop.
5. Commit to a long-term program of a triennial summit of Church organisations in the broadest sense, to keep the mission relevant, improve co-ordination and foster sustained programs of formation.
6. Immediately and fully implement (as far as possible) the recommendations of 'The light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia'.
7. The final statements of the Plenary Council should affirm the importance of Catholic Social Teaching and strongly affirm the ongoing role of Catholic social service agencies in the mission of the church.
8. Church leadership should ensure the sustainability of peak co-ordinating social service bodies at state and national levels.
9. Church leadership nationally and Catholic social service agencies should continue to invest in formation for staff and volunteers, to grow a deeper understanding of how Catholic Social Teaching principles may influence our approach to inclusion, charity and justice.

The concluding statement from the First General Assembly (p.4) makes clear that a key theme of all deliberations held was 'the call to go out to the margins'. This is a sure start. But it is also time for the Church to listen to those who are already working on the margins. It is not enough to only go out and accompany those on the margins, there is a deep need to actively work at critiquing and dismantling the systems and structures that afflict those who are marginalised and disadvantaged by our society. It is time to be in fidelity to the promise that all might have life, and have it abundantly. 'Come, Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit of the Great South Land.'

In 'A Message from the President', (p.1) within the plenary's latest working document, *First Assembly Proposals from Small Groups and Individual Members*, Bishop Tim Costelloe SBD says of the first gathering: '...we explored together possible ways of re-casting ourselves, re-positioning ourselves, the Church in Australia, **for our mission of becoming more fully a clear, unambiguous, and effective sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all people'** (emphasis added).

In light of this, and in addition to these previous nine recommendations that fit within the broad theme of enhancing an outward focus on Social Justice and Equity, we recommend that:

10. The final Plenary Council statements include a strong, clear statement committing the Church to work towards a more compassionate, just and equitable Australian society. Following this the ACBC give a strong mandate for Church leadership and social service agencies to advocate for social justice as core work.

Grounding Ourselves: Catholic Social Teaching and Scripture

Pope Francis calls for greater social engagement as at the heart of the Gospel

What does God want for human beings if not the fulfilment and flourishing of each and all of us, in this life as well as the next?

Christian advocacy and social engagement are based on this conviction that God identifies intensely with the marginalised and poor, as Jesus says in the parable of the Last Judgement scene in Matthew chapter 25: ‘When did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked, in prison? The judge (God) replies, ‘that was me you saw.’

Religion is here not as a solace for the oppressed, as Karl Marx charged, but a sacred summons to have a real care for one another, especially for the excluded and struggling. It is a summons to be alert for them in our own personal circles of work, family and local community. But especially in our age, we need to be involved with efforts at social reform and activism for a more just world. ‘Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labour is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation. For Christians, the responsibility is even greater: it is a commandment.¹

Pope Francis is calling the whole Church to renewed engagement with the great problems of our day, involving a thorough reform in our practices and structures, so that we more clearly embody the Gospel message ‘in solidarity with the struggles and aspirations of all humanity.²

Yet he is concerned that many Catholics have too narrow a view of their ‘mission’ and fail to see the social implications of the Gospel. They may limit being ‘missionary disciples’ only to the internal workings of the Church or to converting others to become Catholics, necessary as these activities may be.

Instead, Francis in his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli tutti: on Fraternity and Social Friendship* reflects on the great commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves. The parable of the Good Samaritan is like dynamite, since Jesus insists that this true ‘neighbour’ is not the person who lives next door but a complete stranger, from a hostile tribe moreover and not of the right religion; this is the only one who tends the injured man’s messy wounds, carries him to an inn, pays a significant amount of money for his nursing and recuperation, and on his return visits him.

Francis asks us not to overlook the detail that those who passed by the wounded man were religious people, a priest and a Levite. ‘It shows that belief in God and the worship of God are not enough to ensure that we are actually living in a way pleasing to God.’ (FT, #74).

‘An authentic faith... always includes the deep wish to change the world, transmit values, and leave this earth somehow better than we found it’, Francis wrote. He quoted Pope Benedict’s *Deus Caritas Est*, #28 that the Church ‘cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.’ Francis repeatedly emphasises this social dimension of the Gospel as essential to any ‘new evangelisation’. (EG, #183).

¹ ‘Pope’s Address to “Popular Movements”, Santa Cruz, Bolivia, 9 July 2015,
<https://catholic.net/op/articles/3211/cat/1242/pope-francis-proposes-new-work-of-mercy-.html>.

² Pope Francis, Address at the Opening of the Synod, Vatican, 9 October 2021,
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/10/09/211009a.html>.

'We must never neutralise this social dimension of the Christian faith. As I mentioned in *Evangelii gaudium*, the kerygma or proclamation of the Christian faith itself has a social dimension. It invites us to build a society where the logic of the Beatitudes and of a fraternal world of solidarity triumphs.'³

The Pope is stirring up the social conscience of Catholics in this 'change of era'.⁴ His 2015 encyclical *Laudato si'* strove to focus the energies and resources of Catholics and others of good will on the unfolding global crises of hunger, poverty, war, astonishing inequalities of wealth, economic crises and the looming disasters from climate change.

The preferential option for the poor is not a political option, he said, but is 'at the centre of the Gospel'.⁵ '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.' (EG, #187). 'Every one of us can contribute to realising the works of the Reign of God on earth... dedicating ourselves in tenderness and solidarity for the benefit of our neighbours, especially the poorest.'⁶

The mission is to serve

The Pope sketches the scope of mission as being both global and local, according to our personal circumstances and opportunities, as the Holy Spirit moves us. 'The Church's evangelising mission finds outward fulfilment in the transformation of our world and in the care of creation.'⁷ This mission 'means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter.' (EG, #188).

Francis urges a 'cultural revolution' in the church, to undertake 'the slow work of changing structures, through participation in public dialogue, where decisions are made that affect the lives of the most vulnerable.' He said that the social apostolate is to empower people 'to *promote processes* [italics added] and to encourage hope, to help communities grow, to be aware of their rights, to apply their talents, and create their own futures'.⁸

'While it is quite true that the essential vocation and mission of the lay faithful is to strive that earthly realities and all human activity may be transformed by the Gospel, none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice.' (EG, 201) The Church must be prepared to speak out firmly in defence of human rights and the common good and, in a quote from Pope Benedict, Francis reiterated that the Church 'has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities.'(FT, #276).

For Church leaders to be effective advocates for human wellbeing they need to be supported and briefed by relevant specialists in social policy, advocacy and communications, especially those close to the ground in Catholic social services and social justice networks. Without such well-resourced

³ Pope Francis, 'Always Together', Commonweal, 1 October 2021, in <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/always-together>.

⁴ Pope Francis at the decennial National Convention of the Italian Church, Florence, 10 November 2015, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2015/inside/documents/papa-francesco-prato-firenze_2015.html.

⁵ Pope Francis, General Audience, Rome, 19 August 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200819_udienza-generale.html

⁶ Pope Francis, 'Always Together', Commonweal, 1 October 2021.

⁷ Pope Francis, 'Message for World Day of Mission, 6 January 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/missions/documents/papa-francesco_20210106_giornata-missionaria2021.html.

⁸ 'Pope urges Jesuits to be close to the most vulnerable', *Zenit*, 7 November 2019. <https://fi.pinterest.com/pin/508695720412222046/>, accessed 8 November 2019.

and professionally skilled organisations, the official voice of the Church will likely be marginalised in the democratic public forum.

Francis laments that the role of lay ministries is often 'not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors. It often remains tied to tasks within the Church, without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society.' (EG, #102)

Francis calls for 'a church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship, goes forth from its sacristies, in order to accompany life... to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation.' (FT, #276).

'I want a church of the poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelised by them.' (EG, #198).

To believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in everyone means realising that God seeks to penetrate every human situation and all social bonds... From the heart of the Gospel we see the profound connection between evangelisation and human advancement'. (EG,#178).

Cardijn's 'see, judge, act' method

Faced with great social problems of hunger, poverty, civil wars, dictatorships, revolutions and growing inequality, the Catholic Action movements in Latin America used methods of critiquing social injustice through the lens of the Gospels, so that faith became a powerful engine for social engagement and activism.

The method was based on the famous 'see, judge, act' process developed by a Belgian priest, Joseph Cardijn. Small groups or communities would gather to reflect on their lives and social issues ('see') in conjunction with a discussion of a Gospel passage ('judge'), followed by a search for solutions ('act'). It was a practical method of empowering people to take charge of their lives and social situations.

It offered these people a deep sense of fellowship, meaning and motivation in their workplaces or communities, putting steel in their spines for the struggles ahead. The method relied on people's real-life experience and problems, in an ongoing conversation with members of their groups. Many groups had a chaplain who acted as an animator and adviser, but members made their own decisions, inspired by the Scriptures and Church social teaching, though not claiming to act formally in the name of the Church.

Cardijn highlighted two key words, **consciousness** and **responsibility**. Consciousness about social problems entailed investigation and research about what needed to be done to challenge or reform situations. Responsibility to bring about change required sustained commitment as well as learning skills for organisation and advocacy.

Strongly influenced by Cardijn's approach, the Amazon Synod in 2019 clearly highlighted the Church's call to serve humanity by engaging closely with social and cultural realities, especially concerns of the Indigenous peoples, the threat of climate change and the continued economic spoliation of the Amazon. The Synod drew from the experience of the Latin American churches over six decades learning the process of engaging faith with the social realities through this 'see, judge, act' culture.

The Cardijn movements were also significant lay organisations in Australia from the 1940s to the 1960s, known especially as the Young Christian Workers Movement (YCW).⁹

A discernment process like 'see, judge, act' for the whole Church?

Pope Francis is urging the entire Church in effect to learn such processes of engagement with social and other issues, beginning with the local but with a keen eye on wider and global matters, especially hunger, poverty, climate change and extreme inequality.

Pope Francis has long been imbued with the Cardijn method, which is apparent in his documents, including in the *Aparecida Document* after the Latin American conference of bishops in 2007, and *Fratelli tutti* in 2020.

In a recent talk Francis outlined his understanding of Cardijn's 'see, judge, act' method. Francis understands the 'judge' as to 'discern', 'when we allow ourselves to be questioned and challenged' by the Scripture. 'In *Fratelli tutti*, I chose the parable of the Good Samaritan to question our relationship to the world, to others, and in particular to the poorest.'

He noted that 'our Catholic Action movements have developed genuine synodal practices, especially in team life which forms the basis of your experience.' He said that synodality is not a simple discussion, or a plan or program. 'No, it is a style to adopt in which the first protagonist is the Holy Spirit who expresses himself first and foremost in the Word of God, read, meditated on and shared together.' As for action, he said it 'should always come from God's initiative', since the Lord is 'walking "incognito" in the history we inhabit.'¹⁰

Francis reminds Catholics that God has redeemed 'all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone!' Even the atheists, he reiterated. 'The Lord created us in God's image and likeness, and ... all of us have this commandment at heart: do good and do not do evil.' God expects us to treat each other as living images of God, with care and respect. 'We must meet each other doing good.'¹¹

'God sees with his heart. And God's love is the same for everyone, regardless of religion. Even if we are atheists, his love is the same.' (FT, #281). 'Non-Christians, by God's gracious initiative, when they are faithful to their own consciences, can live 'justified by the grace of God', and thus 'be associated to the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ' (EG, 254).

In his address for the Opening of the Synod on 9 October 2021, Francis quoted Pope Paul VI that the main lines of the Vatican Council were communion 'and mission, that is, apostolic commitment to the world of today'. Francis warned that this 'is not the same as proselytism'.¹² He elsewhere insists: 'What attracts is our witness... Words come.... But witness comes first: people should see the Gospel, read the Gospel, in our lives.'¹³

⁹ The Australian scholar Dr Stefan Gigacz has written a magisterial thesis on the life and influence of Cardijn, "The Leaven in the Council: Joseph Cardijn and the Jocist Network at Vatican II," which can be accessed online [here](#).

¹⁰ 'Pope Francis reflects on review of life and see-judge-act', Address to the French Specialised Catholic Action movement on 13 January 2022, posted at Australian Cardijn Institute, 14 January 2022, <https://australiancardijniinstitute.org/pope-francis-reflects-on-review-of-life-and-see-judge-act/>.

¹¹ Pope Francis, Homily, Rome, 22 May 2013. In David Gibson, 'Pope Francis: God redeemed everyone, "not just Catholics"', *Washington Post*, 22 May 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/pope-francis-god-redeemed-everyone-not-just-catholics/2013/05/22/f90da324-c311-11e2-9642-a56177f1cdf7_story.html.

¹² Pope Francis, Address for the Opening of the Synod on 9 October 2021.

¹³ Pope Francis, Address to the Pilgrimage of Catechists, 27 September 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130927_pellegrinaggio-catechisti.html

At the Synod, Francis named the problem of clericalism which separates a priest from his people by acting more like a 'landlord' than a pastor, resulting in 'frustration and impatience felt by many pastoral workers, members of diocesan and parish consultative bodies and women, who frequently remain on the fringes. Enabling everyone to participate is an essential ecclesial duty. All the baptised, for baptism is our identity card.'

Francis insists: 'It is important that the synodal process be exactly this: a *process* [italics added] of becoming, a process that involves the local churches, in different phases and from the bottom up, in an exciting and engaging effort that can forge a style of communion and participation directed to mission.'

Francis said that the Church needed to move '*not occasionally but structurally* towards a *synodal Church*, an open square where all can feel at home and participate.' We must become a 'listening church', and a 'Church of closeness', imbibing 'God's own "style" which is closeness, compassion and tender love.' Francis dreams of a 'Church that does not stand aloof from life, but immerses herself in today's problems and needs, bandaging wounds and healing broken hearts with the balm of God.'¹⁴

¹⁴ Pope Francis, Address for the Opening of the Synod on 9 October 2021.

Conclusion

What does this mean for us in Australia, faced with the social consequences of Covid-19, unprecedented fires and floods, growing inequality, the exploitation of workers — especially of migrants and refugees, the Uluru Statement from our Indigenous peoples, the housing crisis, the mass migration of peoples and the effects of a changing climate? And how can we as a Church make more noise about the urgency of Australia advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals as Pope Francis has urged, to secure a decent global future for everyone? All of these affect the work and position of Catholic social services, as they respond to the needs of all who seek assistance.

'Our God is not inert, but our God – allow me to say - is a dreamer: one who dreams of the transformation of the world, and accomplished it in the mystery of the Resurrection.'¹⁵

Francis concluded his Opening Address to the Synod praying that the Holy Spirit would come, and 'keep us from becoming a "museum church", beautiful but mute, with much past and little future.' 'Come, Creator Spirit, renew the face of the earth.'¹⁶

This is a crucial moment in the life of the Church in Australia. The Plenary Council provides such an exciting and forward-looking opportunity for the Church to consider 'How do we move ahead?' How can the Church use its collective activity to address structural causes of disadvantage, to enact the values of the Gospel, to assist others – meaning all people – to welcome the stranger, to walk his or her path, all of which are firmly rooted in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. This is solidarity — the dignity of the human person, care for our earth and the common good — in action.

How can we respond and rise to the challenge that Pope Francis has laid out? It is time for such profound questions, and we hope, a program that can be agreed upon to respond.

To conclude, we again ask the Members of the Plenary Council and the final statements of the Plenary Council to:

- Affirm the importance of Catholic Social Teaching and strongly affirm the ongoing role of Catholic Social service agencies in the mission of the church.
- Affirm that Church leadership should ensure the sustainability of peak co-ordinating social service bodies at state and national levels.
- Affirm the core role of Church leadership nationally and Catholic social service agencies to invest in formation for staff and volunteers, to grow a deeper understanding of how Catholic Social Teaching principles may influence our approach to inclusion, charity and justice.
- Make a strong, clear statement committing the Church to work towards a more compassionate, just and equitable Australian society.

The Plenary Council dialogue regarding the future of the Church in Australia is welcomed, but it cannot end with the conclusion of the Plenary Council in 2022!

The Plenary Council has stimulated much productive dialogue and engagement outside of the Members of the Plenary Council as well as within. We see a wide range of people and organisations wishing to continue working towards the rejuvenation of the Church to make it relevant to current and future generations. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we can see the Church in Australia is an emergent

¹⁵ Pope Francis, General Audience, 17 May 2017,
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170517_udienza-generale.html

¹⁶ Pope Francis, Address for the Opening of the Synod on 9 October 2021.

Church, just as its people are. A commitment from the ACBC to a tri-ennial synodal engagement open to all parts of the Church could be a powerful mechanism to enable the work of the Holy Spirit, and to see ongoing engagement of people in shaping the future of the Church.

As preparations continue for the second assembly, our prayer is that these words of Pope Francis may continue to inspire us: 'Let us seek out others and embrace the world as it is, without fear of pain or a sense of inadequacy, because there we will discover all the goodness that God has planted in human hearts.'¹⁷

Our prayer for all members of the Plenary Council is that the Holy Spirit continues to guide them. We hope that each will consider this paper, and use it to guide their own reflections and thinking, and see value in the recommendations, discussion and work together towards their implementation and enactment.

For any further details, or for any other questions, please be in touch with Catholic Social Services Victoria via [email](#).

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *FRATELLI TUTTI* (No. 78), 3 October 2020.

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

Appendix 1: Summary of Recommendations

1. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) and dioceses should commit to a long-term capability for the church to be a voice for those at the periphery, at state and national levels, for the common good.
2. The '[Parish as Centre of Service](#)' subsidiarity model can be more widely promoted by dioceses.
3. The ACBC and dioceses should express solidarity with Indigenous leadership in the movement towards truth telling, treaty and voice.
4. Plenary Council recommend a new strategic conversation to create a new paradigm of an Australian Catholic Church, guided by the spirit of Saint Mary McKillop.
5. Commit to a long-term program of a triennial summit of Church organisations in the broadest sense, to keep the mission relevant, improve co-ordination and foster sustained programs of formation.
6. Immediately and fully implement (as far as possible) the recommendations of 'The light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia'.
7. The final statements of the Plenary Council should affirm the importance of Catholic Social Teaching and strongly affirm the ongoing role of Catholic social service agencies in the mission of the church.
8. Church leadership should ensure the sustainability of peak co-ordinating social service bodies at state and national levels.
9. Church leadership nationally and Catholic social service agencies should continue to invest in formation for staff and volunteers, to grow a deeper understanding of how Catholic Social Teaching principles may influence our approach to inclusion, charity and justice.
10. The final Plenary Council statements include a strong statement committing the Church to work towards a more compassionate, just and equitable Australian society. Following this the ACBC give a strong mandate for Church leadership and social service agencies to advocate for social justice as core work.

Appendix 2: The work of the ACBC over time could help inform our future

Each year since 1940 the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference have released a major statement, reflecting deeply on social issues in light of Church teaching, signs of the times, and reality faced by Australians. These come out on Social Justice Sunday (the last Sunday in September). Related materials are produced including ten step leaflets, prayer cards, liturgy notes, community education resources, powerpoints etc.

Catholic Social Services Victoria stand ready to assist with contemporary and on ground knowledge that may assist the Plenary Council, but we thought it worth listing the titles of the ACBC Social Justice Statements, many of which hold aspirations that can only be cooperatively realised. The question put to the Plenary Council is 'What is God asking of us?' and we have been asked to 'Listen to what the Spirit is saying'. Perhaps by looking back over the titles of some of these social justice statements, and reading what they contain, they may prompt a way to look forward.

- 1940** *Bishops' Statement on Social Justice*
- 1941** *Justice Now!*
- 1942** *For Freedom*
- 1943** *Pattern for Peace*
- 1944** *The Family*
- 1945** *The Land is Your Business*
- 1946** *Social Security and Human Rights*
- 1947** *Peace in Industry*
- 1948** *Socialisation*
- 1949** *Christian Education in a Democratic Community*
- 1950** *Morality in Public Life*
- 1951** *The Future Australia*
- 1952** *Food or Famine*
- 1953** *Land Without People*
- 1954** *The Australian Standard of Living*
- 1955** *The Big Cities*
- 1956** *Hunger*
- 1957** *Australia's Bold Adventure*
- 1958** *Massacre on the Roads*
- 1959** *The Natural Law*
- 1960** *International Social Justice*
- 1961** *What Do You Read?*
- 1962** *What the Vatican Council Means To You*
(During the Vatican II Council [1962-65] the Bishops were back and forth to Rome and did not release statements)
- 1966** *The Moral Code*
- 1973** *Population in Perspective*
- 1974** *Lucky Australia*
- 1975** *The Social Side of Sin*
- 1976** *Towards a Whole Community*
- 1977** *A New Australia*
- 1978** *Aborigines: A Statement of Concern*
- 1979** *Beyond Unemployment: A Statement on Human Labour*
- 1980** *Poverty, Power and the Church*
- 1981** *Partners: Australia, Asia, The Pacific*

1982 *House and Home: A Christian Call for Housing Justice*
1983 *Changing Australia*
1984 *It's a Rocky Road: Young People in Australia*
1985 *Work for a Just Peace*
1986 *Founded on Justice and Peace*
1987 *A Just and Proper Settlement*
1988 *Prison: The Last Resort*
1989 *Catholics Look at Wealth Distribution*
1990 *Social Justice in Everyday Life*
1991 *I Am a Stranger: Will You Welcome Me? The Immigration Debate*
1992 *Common Wealth for the Common Good*
1993 *Recognition: The Way Forward*
1994 *Putting People First: A Word in Support of the Unemployed*
1995 *Tolerance: A Christian Perspective on the International Year for Tolerance*
1996 *A New Beginning: Eradicating Poverty in our World*
1997 *Seeking Justice*
1998 *The Challenge of the Aging*
1999 *Jubilee Justice*
2000 *Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond*
2001 *A Just and Peaceful Land: Rural and Regional Australia*
2002 *A New Earth: The Environmental Challenge*
2003 *A Generous Heart in the Love of Christ: Challenging Racism in Australia*
2004 *Peace Be With You: Cultivating a Culture of Peace*
2005 *Jesus, Light for the World: Living the Gospel Today*
2006 *The Heart of our Country: Dignity and Justice for our Indigenous Sisters and Brothers*
2007 *Who is my neighbour? Australia as a Global Citizen*
2008 *A Rich Young Nation: The Challenge of Affluence and Poverty in Australia*
2009 *And You Will Be My Witnesses: Young People and Justice*
2010 *Violence in Australia: A Message of Peace*
2011-2012 *Building Bridges, Not Walls: Prisons and the Justice System*
2012-2013 *The Gift of Family in Difficult Times: The Social and Economic Challenges Facing Families Today*
2013-2014 *Lazarus at our Gate: A Critical Moment in the Fight Against World Poverty*
2014-2015 *A Crown for Australia: Striving for the Best in our Sporting Nation*
2015-2016 *For Those Who've Come Across the Seas: Justice for Refugees and Asylum Seekers*
2016-2017 *A Place at the Table: Social Justice in an Ageing Society*
2017-2018 *Everyone's Business: Developing an Inclusive and Sustainable Economy*
2018-2019 *A Place to Call Home: Making a Home for Everyone in our Land*
2019-2020 *Making it Real: Genuine Human Encounter in our Modern World*
2020-2021 *To Live Life to the Full: Mental Health in Australia Today*
2021-2022 *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*

- The social justice statements from 2000 onwards are available for download [here](#)
- The social justice statements from 1988 – 2013 can be purchased in print [here](#)
- A not-quite, but almost, complete collection of these statements are held in hard copy at the CSSV office in the Cardinal Knox Centre, East Melbourne. Access can be arranged via appointment – contact the office [here](#).

Appendix 3: Catholic Social Services Victoria Member Organisations

Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Victoria
Assisi Centre
Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH)
Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project
Cabrini Outreach
CatholicCare Victoria
Catholic Women's League Victoria and Wagga Wagga
Corazon
Corpus Christi Community
Don Bosco Youth Centre & Hostel Inc.
Edmund Rice Camps (Amberley)
Edmund Rice Refugee and Community Services
Edmund Rice Services – Mt Atkinson
Good Samaritan Inn
Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand
Griefline
House of Welcome Ballarat
Highways & Byways: A Community of Service (Missionary Sisters of Service)
Jesuit Social Services
JoCare
John Pierce Centre for Deaf Ministry
Kewn Kreestha (Family Care Sisters)
Keysborough Learning Centre
LinCoN
MacKillop Family Services
Mary Aikenhead Ministries
Nazareth House – Sisters of Nazareth
Order of Malta Hospice Home Care (Vic)
Pregnancy Assistance Frankston
Rosie's Oblate Youth Ministry
Sacred Heart Mission
St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria
St John of God ACCORD
St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre
St Joseph's Home for the Aged - Little Sisters of the Poor
St Joseph's Corner
St Mary's House of Welcome
The Way Community
Vietnamese Catholic Family Mutual Assistance Network
VMCH
VincentCare Victoria
Wellsprings for Women