

WORSHIP/PRAYER

The Church of Maitland-Newcastle is centred on Christ, the Cornerstone, and seeks always to live as a community of people who pray and worship

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

Our Story reminds us that since the beginning Jesus' followers have devoted themselves to the 'breaking of bread and the prayers' – in memory of Jesus.

Foundational Statements point to the qualities that should identify communities of Jesus' disciples who pray and worship.

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 concerns raised.

The family gathering is often a highlight – a summit – of family life, particularly if a milestone is being celebrated – and a source of greater unity and harmony.

When a family gathers, the host/s will have taken time to plan and prepare. Some guests will also prepare a contribution while others may have to travel a distance or care for children or elderly family members and just getting there will be their contribution! Each guest will be welcomed and there may be references to why the gathering's being held and what's happened since the last gathering...

It's a kind of family Introductory Rite.

There are sure to be apologies – I forgot to bring ____, I'm late, I meant to tell you Josh broke his leg and won't be able to do stairs...

It's a kind of family Penitential Rite.

There will be storytelling, and some of the stories will be new and some will be comfortingly familiar. Family members who have died will be recalled lovingly...

It's a kind of family Liturgy of the Word.

When it's mealtime, the collective shopping/menu planning/cooking /table setting/serving will all come together in a joyous, maybe raucous banquet – the kind you'd hate to miss...

It's a kind of family Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Before guests depart and the host begins restoring order, there will be reflections, thanksgiving and resolutions to do it all again – soon!

It's a kind of family Concluding Rite.

OUR STORY

The community of disciples born of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost remained faithful to 'the prayers'. They went as a body to the Temple every day, worshipping God in continuity with their heritage. The Psalms rang out in their hearts in synagogue and Temple worship, just as they had for Jesus. Those who had walked with Jesus in Galilee witnessed to their experience of him at prayer. They had observed Jesus communing with his Father, often seeking solitude for this intimacy. Jesus had taught them how to pray. He invited them in childlike simplicity to boldly and confidently approach Abba, our Father, asking God to reign in our world and provide for our needs.

These eye-witnesses told how Jesus prayed for his Father's guidance and strength when facing difficulties and at critical junctures in his ministry. This was reflected in the practice of the infant church which prayed as a community when confronting challenges and discerning new pathways. The eye-witnesses related how Jesus did mighty works of healing. The early Christians therefore invoked the name of Jesus confidently, calling on him to work through them to heal.

Most distinctively of all, the first Christians met in their homes for the breaking of bread. 'Do this in memory of me', Jesus had said. Feeding with earthly sustenance was accompanied by the meal of Christ's Body and Blood. Like the two disciples at Emmaus 'they recognised him in the breaking of bread'.

At the heart of their celebration was the unity and love which Jesus had prayed for at the last supper when he gave himself in the humble service of washing feet and in the Eucharist.

Today prayer still unites us with God as individuals and as diocese, and with one another in Christ.

The heart of our union is the Eucharist, the 'source and summit of the Christian life'. As Catholics in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle we gather at our parish Mass to celebrate the Lord's Day.

The Lord himself is present in word and action, in the very community he gathers around him, and in the Priest who presides. We are sustained by the word of Scripture, and nourished on Eucharist.

We go from Mass taking all we have celebrated to our lives, and the love of God to our encounters.

As it was in Apostolic times we celebrate birth into our Catholic Christian community. Immersion into the life of God and the life of the community is accomplished in the Sacrament of Baptism.

Infants are welcomed and cherished. Adults are embraced. The baptised are confirmed in Christian faith and fully initiated into the community of Christ's disciples in the Eucharistic meal. Here they have access to the fullness of sacramental blessings bestowed by our gracious Lord.

As well as our sacramental and liturgical celebrations, there are within our diocese opportunities to commune with God in the intimacy of solitude, and in the embrace of community. Eucharistic adoration, rosary, charismatic gatherings, Zoom prayer meetings and Lectio Divina are but some of the devotions enriching the lives of individuals and faith communities.

FOUNDATIONAL STATEMENTS

We gather in community – to pray, to break open the Word, to celebrate, to encourage and support one another, to mourn our losses, to be nourished and strengthened for mission.

In the face of so many wounds that hurt us and could lead to a hardness of heart, we are called to dive into the sea of prayer, which is the sea of the boundless love of God, in order to experience his tenderness. (Pope Francis on Twitter)

Miracles happen. But prayer is needed! Prayer that is courageous, struggling and persevering, not prayer that is a mere formality (Pope Francis on Twitter)

You pray for the hungry. Then you feed them. That's how prayer works (Pope Francis on Twitter)

We believe that our mission finds its source and summit in the Eucharist (LG 11). When lived in everyday life and celebrated in the liturgy, the Eucharist is the living symbol of Christ's life, death and resurrection and celebrates the deepest identity of the Church as a communion of life, love and truth.

When you hear 'The body of Christ' you reply 'Amen.' Be a member of Christ's body, then, so that your 'Amen' may ring true (from a homily by St Augustine)

We seldom notice how each day is a holy place/ Where the eucharist of the ordinary happens/ Transforming our broken fragments/ Into an eternal continuity that keeps us (John O'Donohue A Book of Blessings 2007).

"The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open ... This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself 'the door': Baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak" (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 47).

We know that life has a sacramental dimension and that our sacramental rituals are moments of deeper communion with the God who created us for love.

We human beings need signs and symbols to express what cannot be expressed in words (Thomas Groome, *What Makes Us Catholic: the Sacramental Principle* 2012).

Catholic Christians tend to associate sacramentality too exclusively with what happens in church, with the celebration of the seven sacraments. ... the great sacraments are simply climactic celebrations of the sacramentality of life... (Ibid).

... all the sacraments are symbolised by the 'ordinary' of life, by bread, wine, water, oil, touch, words, gestures, and lovemaking in marriage. Each symbolises something profoundly every day that by the power of God's Spirit continues the saving mission of Jesus (Ibid).

CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. PRAYER, CONTEMPLATION, CONVERSION

What we heard:

- *As followers of Jesus we are all called to holiness, to deepen our relationship with God, our friendship with Jesus, to be more reflective and self-aware*
- *We need to trust that if we seek we shall find, ask we shall receive, knock and the door will be open*
- *We become prayerful and Eucharistic by adopting an attitude of gratefulness (cf. Greek word eucharistia, which means 'thanksgiving')*
- *The need to recognise the diversity in faith expression*

What we recommend:

WP 1.1 That the Diocese develop and provide new liturgical and prayerful experiences, both formal and informal, to help people pray in their daily lives.

WP 1.2 That space and experiences for silence, meditation, contemplation and mindfulness be promoted and encouraged with formation given in listening to and discerning the voice of the Spirit.

2. EUCHARIST

What we heard:

- *A need to strengthen and affirm what is already present in the Eucharist: This is the Body of Christ. You are the Body of Christ. Be the Body of Christ*
- *A need to proclaim the message of mercy, compassion and forgiveness at Eucharist and then go out and live that in the world ... through Him, with Him, in Him*
- *A need to "Do this in remembrance of me." You are that living Eucharist and the living temple of God. You are the church on mission*
- *The Eucharist, when lived in everyday life and celebrated in the liturgy, as the source and summit of our life as Jesus' disciples*
- *Falling Mass attendance and ageing, diminishing parish communities; The need for better attention to all aspects of liturgy: music, homilies, translation*
- *Language of Liturgy which presently portrays a very limited way of thinking about God, and continues to use sexist language*
- *The need for Communion for all, and Eucharistic hospitality*

What we recommend:

WP 2.1 That we deepen our shared understanding of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, in ourselves and in others; of how this presence connects all elements of our Christian calling, worship and service; and of how the Mass/Eucharist nourish the hope and joy that is a foundation for our service to the world - Do this in memory of me.

WP 2.2 That we acknowledge and encourage the active involvement of different cultures be explored in liturgical ministries, including ways of connecting with and learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality and that of other cultures, and how

some of the sacred rituals, dance, music and customs might be more effectively incorporated into Australian liturgical celebrations and worship.

3. HOMILIES

What we heard:

- *Better homilies and pastoral care from priests - stronger and more engaging preaching with emphasis on the Word of God and its connection to people's everyday lives*
- *Homilies that support an educated laity in developing mature spirituality, that enable all God's people to hear the message of the Scriptures delivered in an engaging and appealing manner*
- *Help for overseas priests to deliver homilies, and to assist them to communicate and apply the Scriptures to Australian life*
- *Involvement of lay people in presenting homilies – e.g. to share their struggles in their faith lives in an "experience sharing session"*
- *Ways to allow interaction on the homily – either during or after Mass – in order to encourage missionary service*
- *A response to Pope Francis' words: So many concerns have been expressed about this important ministry, we cannot simply ignore them. (Evangelli Gaudium #135)*

What we recommend:

WP 3.1 That lay men and women be trained and formed to exercise their gifts and talents in various ecclesial community settings, including preaching in the liturgical context.

WP 3.2 That homilists be encouraged to reflect with their parishioners on the Sunday readings in order to connect these with the daily lives and culture of the local community.

4. GATHERINGS OTHER THAN MASS

What we heard:

- *At Mass people are relatively passive and never have the opportunity to share their understanding of the Scriptures or their life experiences; only the presider has the opportunity to share his faith at Mass*
- *Less formal, lay-led gatherings for prayer/worship would give people the opportunity to share their faith and views, to relate community worship and prayer to people's hopes and fear, joys and suffering, and to build relationships*
- *Responses to people's lives impacted by social and natural tragedies can more readily be addressed by more contemporary and less structured prayer/worship forms*

What we recommend:

WP 4.1 That meaningful and interactive opportunities be provided for people to gather for fellowship, prayer and worship

WP 4.2 That prayer experiences in response to communal matters of significance (bushfires, floods, droughts, war, grief, pandemic) be offered so that connection is made between our faith and social action and our life experiences

WP 4.3 That the diocese continue to call, form and commission appropriately trained lay people to lead Liturgies of the Word and to break open the Word within the community

5. SACRAMENTS

What we heard:

- *The sacraments, for many people, seem to be unrelated to their lives in the real world*
- *The reception of the sacraments seems to have little practical effect in making disciples*
- *There is great decline in the use of the sacrament of Penance in its present forms*
- *There is concern about the administration of the Sacrament of Initiation*
- *All the baptised have the right and responsibility for the mission of the Church*
- *The celebration of marriage and funerals often cause conflict*
- *People often seem to turn away from frequenting the sacraments because of the necessity to abide strictly to liturgical norms*
- *While there are many parts, there is but one Body, and there are a variety of gifts within the Church waiting to be tapped*
- *While parishes/ diocese depend on women for many forms of ministry they are not seen in positions of authority*

What we recommend:

WP 5.1 That at small community level there be a meaningful engagement with families who present their children for the sacraments of initiation.

WP 5.2 That there be a concerted effort to help people develop their understanding of the Sacraments in an adult way, not relying on their primary school learning.

WP 5.3 That the Third Rite of Reconciliation be restored in the Church in Australia.

WP 5.4 That the diocese commission capable and suitably trained lay people to specific ministries within the Church's sacramental life, including Baptism, preaching on the Gospel, blessing and witnessing marriages on behalf of the Church and officiating at funerals.