



Queensland Catholic Education Commission

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QCEC submission to the Plenary Council 2020

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Introduction

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) is pleased to provide a submission to Plenary Council 2020. The Plenary Council provides an invaluable opportunity for all in the Church, to reflect upon our Mission and Vision and discern what God is asking us to do in the 21st Century.

QCEC is the peak strategic body with state-wide responsibilities for Catholic schooling in Queensland. This submission is provided on behalf of the five Diocesan Catholic school authorities and 17 Religious Institutes and other incorporated bodies which, between them, operate a total of 306 Catholic schools that educate more than 147,000 students in Queensland.

The submission provided is based on the responses QCEC has received from members of its Faith Formation and RE (FFRE) network where this issue has been considered. Examples of questions raised by students and staff as part of this discernment process are provided at Attachment 1. In addition to the feedback received directly from our Catholic School Authorities, QCEC also draws on its Mission of Catholic schools in Queensland document when considering this question:

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

There are six implications from this question that form the structure of the QCEC response which are:

1. Inclusivity
2. Authenticity
3. Meaning for life
4. Integration of life, culture and faith
5. Values and a framework for action
6. Formation

Inclusivity

The majority of responses from staff and students were about being inclusive. They felt God is asking us to be welcoming, inclusive, joyful and operate within a modern concept of family that is both safe and caring. Respondents were clear that all (men, women, married, single, lay, ordained) should be eligible to be considered for leadership (*deliberative and not just consultative*) in the Church, even if it means a major restructure.

Respondents call for a re-focus on what is church: not as a place, but a group of people whose faith can be exercised anywhere. There is a feeling that the rules of the church have worked to marginalise though originally designed to define who belongs, and what church stands for. For everyone to feel authentically welcomed, accepted, supported and cared for by the church.

Authenticity

There is a strong sentiment that God is asking the Church to be authentic. Feedback from our Catholic School Authorities (including school students) calls for a review of practices which fail to inspire or achieve love of God and love of neighbour. There is a desire for less emphasis on rules, dogma, admonishments and divine rewards and more focus on healing and experiential practices that are reflective, relevant and life giving, foster personal encounter and a relationship with Jesus. Overall the discernment is asking for a new vision stripped of social and historical biases to see how to achieve an incarnation in the human heart and conserve what is worth conserving. How we build our experiential practices into the curriculum is the most challenging and creative opportunity for Catholic schools.

Meaning for life

Responses were clear that God is essential and centrally important in their lives and the Church should be a place that facilitates this awareness. They endorsed the view that Catholic schools are expected to provide quality learning and teaching as well as assist students in their search for meaning for life. Parents and staff are looking to Catholic schools as a source of hope and wisdom, providing an experience for students of hope and confidence in the future.

Integration of life, culture and faith

There is a theme throughout that God is asking at this time for discerned integration of life, culture and faith. They want the work of Catholic schools to go beyond teaching for understanding to providing opportunity for personal and collective action formed from wisdom and applied to the lives of students as well as addressing issues of relevance beyond their immediate world. Feedback received by QCEC indicates that our staff and students want the Church to focus on the task of healing, reconciling, forgiving and peacemaking and less on theology about certain transcendent truths; less theory over practice; less worshipping Jesus instead of following Jesus in practical ways.

Liturgy should be worked with a degree of flexibility in the local context along with expert liturgists, not just clerics. There could be more scope for indigenous liturgy.

Values and a framework for action

The Catholic Social Teachings are often cited as a framework for action and are much valued. Respondents made a distinction between family values and morals that can flourish outside of the church, without it, and the role of church in building a spirit of community, social activism and support for the common good as being God's calling; to put the world in a sacred context.

The Church's work in advocating for justice in marginalised communities has been the cornerstone of my Church experience. In following in Jesus' footsteps, founders of various charisms have ensured that the mission of Church is maintained through religious orders and the communities they have been part of. The service model of Church has been the strongest element of Church for me.

Formation

QCEC recognises that there is an ongoing challenge ensuring that all members of staff are provided with opportunities for professional development. Everyone is at different stages of life, experiences, and faith which will influence the nature of the professional development. Although it needs to be invitational, there is an expectation to participate in both professional and religious formation so that teachers in Catholic schools are inspired by the Gospel and are formed in Christian pedagogy. Much work has been done by Catholic School Authorities in Queensland to develop resources that support a Catholic perspective across the taught curriculum other than Religious Education. These are imbedded in the curriculum with suggested pedagogies to support positive learning experiences and promote critical thinking.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee-Anne Perry', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Lee-Anne Perry AM
Executive Director

Questions indicative of what students were asking about the future of the Church

- How is the Church going to adapt to the modern world? Is the Church willing to adapt and change especially regarding its treatment of women and homosexual people?
- Can the Church reconnect with young people by making it more relevant in our lives?
- How can the Church shift the focus from the intricacies and specific rules in the tradition to a focus on Jesus' mission and values?
- How can women get to more prominent, influential positions of power in the Church?
- Will the Church ever accept gay marriage?
- What is the Church doing about climate change?
- Why does the Church want to control women, especially in reproductive matters?
- Can we truly separate Church and State?

Questions indicative of what staff were asking about the future of the Church

- How can we best engage the youth to be active members of our church?
- How can the council create opportunities for the whole Church (including women, young people and families) to be real decision-makers rather than be consulted?
- Can the Church be more transparent in its leadership and processes?
- What active role can the Church play in current worldwide crises such as domestic violence, climate change and migration/refugee issues?
- How will sacraments be administered with declining numbers of clergy?
- How will we educate young people to faith and in faith in an increasingly secular and pluralistic world?
- If WE are the Church then why is the door closed on conversations about women priests, married priests, gay marriage, divorce and church structure?
- How do we make the Church a relevant part of the community? What structural and governance changes will bring authentic life to the relationship between parish, school and community?
- How do we ensure that our parishes across rural and remote areas of the Diocese are supported?