
We, the people of Boonah Catholic parish,
acknowledge the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which our parish is located
and where we conduct our mission and ministry.

We pay our respects to ancestors and elders, past and present.

As a local community of faith within the Church of Brisbane,
we are committed to honouring Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'
unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas
and their rich contribution to society.



Jesus feeds the crowd

Eric Feather

Warm greetings to the members of the Boonah Catholic community and beyond on the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

1. REFLECTIONS ON THE SUNDAY WORD.

The [first reflection](#) for this Sunday is from Catholic Women Preach project and the homilist is Ellen Buelow.

Ellen is a retired teacher who enthusiastically gives back to her community in Albuquerque, N.M. She graduated from the University of Dayton with a BS in Education and has several masters degrees in education. She taught in Ohio, New Mexico and Colorado.



Ellen has three daughters and her husband, Larry volunteered with her at Catholic Charities. As a *Bread for the World* member and the advocacy chair for the *Interfaith Hunger Coalition* she joins others to solve food insecurity in New Mexico.

Over several years the Interfaith Hunger Coalition helped craft the 2021 Food, Hunger and Agriculture Bill. As a Bread for the World member, Ellen and other advocates presented Zoom workshops to NM's three congressional districts to give testimony to NM's legislative committees about this bill.

Ellen has volunteered with Catholic Charities in the archdiocese of Santa Fe since 2006. She enjoys working with refugee youth and their families. Ellen was Catholic Charities' volunteer of the year in 2012. Her faith community is Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary.

Part of her homily includes:

Jesus encourages us to take risks, expect God to act, and to be grateful.

Is God asking you to take a risk? He asked the apostles to risk feeding a hungry crowd.

I volunteer with refugee families who are present day risk takers. They were torn from their homes. Upon arrival in the US, they receive 3 months of resettlement money--\$1100 per person. Consider rent and meeting basic needs. For whom can 3 months be enough time to learn English and get employed? Then comes a life of poverty with minimum wage jobs and getting on welfare. Food insecurity, inability to provide food for your family on a consistent basis, is a daily reality. They have risked much to resettle. Their children risk. They take on the challenges of attending school. Some have missed years of schooling. Now they are fitting in with classmates and learning English. However, these families live with trust in life eventually improving. Their children are their hope.

Click [here](#) to view.

The [second reflection](#) for this Sunday is from Br. Julian McDonald CFC, an Australian.

"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?"



The account of the feeding of the large crowd is the only miracle story that is recorded in all four Gospels. In his Gospel, Mark gives us two versions. It is a story that was particularly significant to the Gospel writers and their communities because of its relevance to the Eucharist. In fact, in Mark's version, Jesus uses the Greek word *eucharisteo* (to give thanks) as he prays in gratitude over the young boy's gift of five barley loaves and two fish. John's account attributes to Jesus the very same actions: "Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and gave them out to all who were sitting ready; he then did the same with the fish, giving out as much as was wanted." These verbs of taking, blessing, breaking and distributing are still repeated in every celebration of the Eucharist. But more of that over the next few Sunday reflections.

Today's gospel-reading closely parallels the first reading from the Book of Kings. To underline that point, I think it is worth repeating today's first reading in its entirety:

One day a man arrived from Baal-shalishah. He brought the man of God twenty loaves of fresh-baked barley bread from the early harvest. Elisha said: "Pass it around to the people to eat." But his servant replied: "For a hundred men? There's not nearly enough!" Elisha said: "Just go ahead and do it, for God says: 'There's plenty. They will eat and have some left over.'" The servant passed around what he had. The people not only ate, but they had leftovers. (2 Kings 4, 42-44)

In today's gospel-reading, John alludes to the close knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures that Jesus had. John observes that, in questioning Philip about how they could possibly feed the huge crowd in front of them, Jesus intended "only to test Philip's faith; for Jesus himself knew exactly what he was going to do" (John 6, 6-7). Jesus knew the story of Elisha, and realised, in his heart, that, in this time and place, he was being asked to be the instrument of God's desire to be the provider of plenty for people in need.

It is important to note that neither Elisha nor Jesus would have been able to feed the crowds around them without the generosity of two unnamed, ordinary people who gave what they had - a farmer and a small boy.

In all this, there is surely a message for us. As I look over my life, I can own that there have been fits and starts about my attempts to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. But in today's second reading from Ephesians, we hear Paul's shake-up message from his prison cell to the Christian Community in Ephesus, and to all of us, too: "I want you to get out there and walk - better yet, run - on the road God called you to travel. I don't want any of you sitting around on your hands...And mark that you do this with humility and discipline - not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert to noticing differences and quick at mending fences...Everything you are and think and do is to be by the one God who is alive and active within you" (Ephesians 4, 1-6).

Implicit in today's gospel-reading are questions for all of us who claim to belong to the very extensive community of Christians: *Do we believe that God will provide us with what we need to carry out the mission in which God wants us to be involved?* Many of us are good at making suggestions and skilled at planning. We make lists of what we want in order to reach out compassionately to the poor, the needy, the lonely and the homeless. *But what attitudes underpin our way of reaching out and our management of the resources we have to share? Does our way of engaging send a message of hope and generosity or do those to whom we reach out see us as people who give grudgingly of our time and resources?* In today's readings from Kings and John, Elisha and Jesus reveal a God of abundance and generosity.

John makes the point that both Philip and Andrew have a measured approach to life. In responding to Jesus, Philip says: "Two hundred denarii would only buy enough to give them (the crowd) a small piece each". Commenting on the young lad's offering of five loaves and two fish, Andrew says: "But what is that between so many?" Yet, woven throughout John's Gospel is the message that God's abundant generosity can be clearly seen in the life and actions of Jesus: In his conversation with the woman at the well in Sychar, Jesus says: "The water I will give (grace, hope, life) will be a spring within, gushing up fountains of endless life" (John 4, 14). At the wedding in Cana, Jesus directed the servants to fill to the brim six large water pots (each with a capacity of 20-30 gallons). The result was an abundant supply of high-quality wine. (John 2, 6-7) In the opening chapter of his Gospel, John describes Jesus as generous to the core: "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (John 1, 16). In his final exhortation to the apostles, Jesus assures them about the future: "There are many rooms in my Father's house; if there were not, I would have told you" (John 14, 2). John concludes his Gospel with the note that he has written only a brief account of Jesus' life and good works: "There are so many other things that Jesus did. If they were all written down, I can't imagine a world big enough to hold such a library of books" (John 21, 25). In John's mind, there is no doubt that Jesus was the personification of God's abundant love and generosity.

Sadly, so many of us in our early years were taught that God would punish our sins severely, that hell awaited us if we persisted in our wickedness. That kind of religion taught us that God's favour was somehow to be earned by personal effort. Yet, today's readings assure us that God loves us freely, abundantly, endlessly; dreams that we might relinquish a faith that is measured and calculated, and grow to reflect some of God's abundant goodness to others.

I conclude with a poem that has been attributed to an Anglican pastor and poet, John Adam (1936-20), who lived and worked for many years in Ireland, absorbing something of the Celtic approach to poetry:

Be gentle . . . when you touch bread.

Let it not lie . . . uncared for, unwanted.

So often . . . bread is taken for granted.

There is such beauty in bread;

beauty of sun and soil, beauty of patient toil.

Wind and sun have caressed it.

Christ often blessed it.

Be gentle...when you touch bread.

Our world would be different if we could see the sacred in all the ordinary things we have and use, and in everyone we meet.



A [third reflection](#) on John 6 is by Kathleen Rushton RSM. There are resonances with the previous reflections and I like her invitation to *contextualise* today's gospel in the 2020s.

From *Tui Motu Magazine*, Issue 261, July 2021: [here](#).

"The planet has enough food for all, but it seems that there is a lack of willingness to share it with everyone" . . . "We ought to set the table for all and ask that there be a table for all." . . . We can pray for "the grace not to fall into the trap of thinking that a well-organized centralization is the path to follow, the grace to understand *Caritas* is always on the periphery in every local church, and the grace to know the central office is there for assistance, service and to promote communion."

Pope Francis, homily during Mass for opening of the General Assembly of Caritas Internationalis, 12 May 2015.

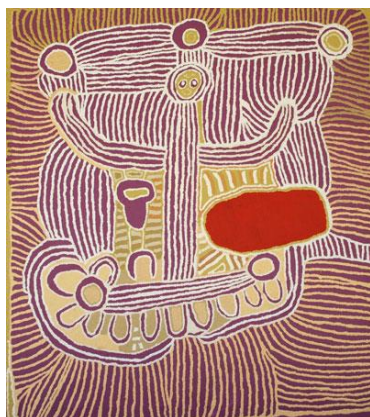
2. *Boonah Parish happenings . . .*

from commands to invitations,
from laws to ideals,
from threats to persuasion,
from coercion to conscience,
from monologue to conversation,
from ruling to serving,
from withdrawn to integrated,
from vertical and top-down to horizontal,
from exclusion to inclusion,
from hostility to friendship,
from static to changing,
from passive acceptance to active engagement,
from prescriptive to principled,
from defined to open-ended,
from behaviour-modification to conversion of heart,
from the dictates of law to the dictates of conscience,
from external conformity to the joyful pursuit of holiness.

When these elements are taken in the aggregate, they indicate a model of spirituality. This, they say, is what good Catholics should look like and this is how they should behave. That means the elements indicate what the Church should look like and how it should behave. This is a significant model-shift. This is a teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

- Fr. John O'Malley SJ, 2006

Our **SUNDAY EUCHARIST** schedule is:



Desert Eucharist
Linda Syddick Napaltjarri (b. 1937)

Saturday

5.00pm Boonah church

Sunday

7.30am 1st and 3rd Sunday: Harrisville church

2nd and 4th Sunday: Peak Crossing church

9.30am Boonah church

Our **WEEKDAY EUCHARIST** schedule for this week, the 16th week of Ordinary Time, is:

Monday 26th July

No Mass

Tuesday 27th July

9.15am **Boonah church** *with parish school students*

Wednesday 28th July

6.00pm, **Peak Crossing church** *followed by dinner at The Peak Pub*

Thursday 29th July

8.00am, **Boonah church**



We pray with and for those who are sick in our parish and beyond: all across the globe infected with COVID-19; former pastor of Boonah parish Fr. Ellis Clifford, Chris Healy, Paul White, Arthur Devin, Liliana Toohill, Libby Shields, Marko Babic, Dermot Peters, Max Gardiner, Bernice Lippiatt, Pat Toohill, Trish Merlehan, Bernadette Pinchin, Simon Greatrex, Neil O'Connor, Cate Mitten, Bernice Brault, Paula Ebrington, Fletcher Casey, Jill Archer, Matthew Bowden, Louisa, David Mitchell and sick members of parish families and those beyond our parish boundaries.

▪ For the celebration of **1st Rite for Reconciliation** and **all sacraments for children and adults** please see me after Sunday Mass to make a convenient time to meet or email the parish.

▪ *Do you want to join the Catholic faith community?*

Are you interested in speaking to someone about a process?

The first step is a cuppa and a conversation. From there we will discern and decide appropriate preparation and support for you. Please see me on the weekend or email the parish:
boonah@bne.catholic.net.au

- **EVERY SUNDAY** when we gather for the Sunday eucharist, there are baskets (of some or another) at the entrances of our two churches.

We are invited to bring a gift of **non-perishable food or goods** for people seeking help from our local St. Vincent de Paul.

There is a great response each Sunday from the assembly at Harrisville. *Thanks!*

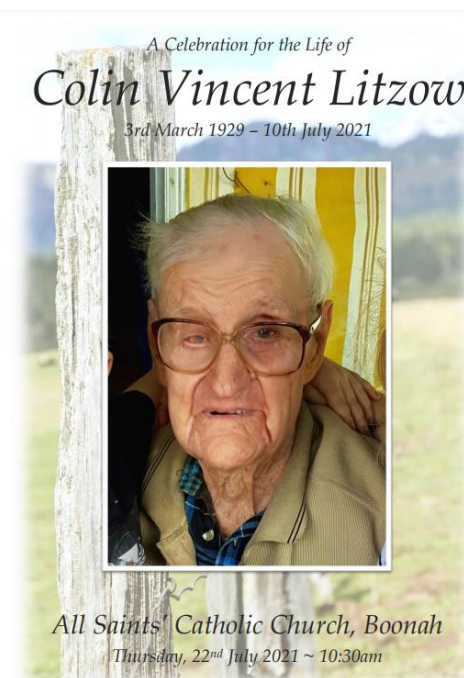
There is also an emerging and positive response from the two assemblies who gather at Boonah. *Thanks!*

The local conference very much appreciates our weekly support.

- **THANK YOU** to all who support the weekly Sunday collection. Your gifts enable the parish to meet its expenses and to function like an everyday household. If you would like to give weekly or monthly in a planned way, please see me.

- This Sunday there is a retiring collection for the annual collection: *Peter's Pence*. It is taken up across the world and allows Pope Francis to respond to people in need with timely and effective emergency assistance.

I was hungry and you fed me
Matthew 25



- On Thursday morning last week, we celebrated the funeral of Colin Litzow. Colin lived in Boonah for much of his life. His wife, Beryl, died almost three years ago and her funeral was celebrated at our Boonah church. We extend our sympathy to Colin's family and friends, especially Gayle and her extended family, and May, Colin's older sister. *May he rest in peace.*

- Our **PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL** met last week. Here is an edited summary of some of the discussion and sharing:

Boonah Church cleaning: A good number of volunteers have been organized in pairs to clean the Church once a fortnight. This roster will begin in August. *Thank you to parishioners across the three churches who clean our churches for the celebration of the liturgy . . . we appreciate this unseen work!*

Parish Care and Concern renewal: Letters will be posted this week to parishioners who have not returned to weekend Mass since the beginning of COVID. Details of weekend Mass times and parish contact numbers have been included along with offers of support and assistance to gather for Mass or to receive Communion at home if unable to gather for Sunday Mass.

COVID update: The new Qld. Gov. check-in procedure seems to be working well at all Masses with only a few not bringing a phone. Marshalls to: 1. Check the cleaners after Mass have sighted the cleaning protocols and have signed off on this. 2. Check upon entry to the churches that additional names of family or friends have been included on the one phone. This is a requirement and must be sighted by the coordinator before entering the churches for Mass.

All Saints' Parish School report: Principal Shane Seymour presented our school's application for a 'Block Grant' to build new classrooms, library, and school administration building. The process involves convincing the review panel of our need for more classrooms and administration space along with improved and tech friendly facilities. The existing facilities do not meet the required floor space requirements in contemporary schools. The final decision is based ensuring the application meets criteria in eight different categories. One factor affecting our application is that Boonah is not currently a population growth area. A positive for the process was the delightful video produced by David Judge and presented by the school in the application process. Final decisions on this application may be known after August.

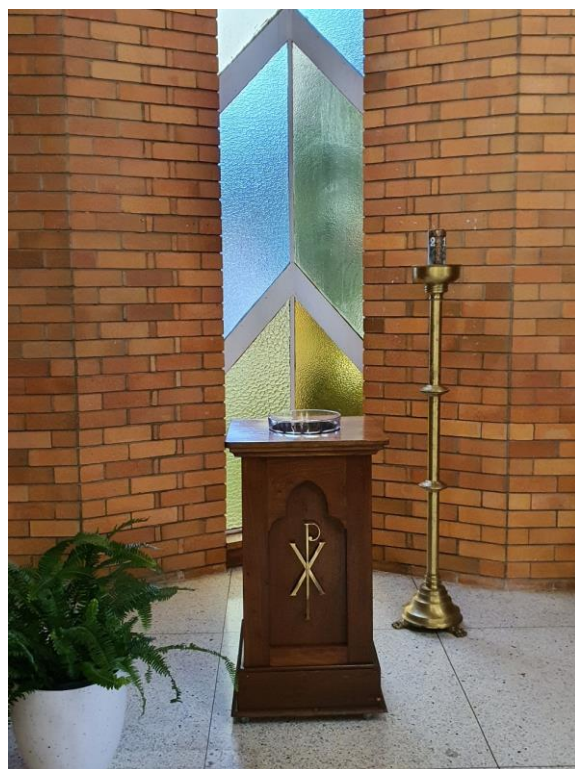
Shane also shared the completed Vision and Mission of our parish school of All Saints'.

Pastor's Report:

- The recent **Archdiocesan Safeguarding audit** of our parish's Safeguarding practices went fairly well overall. There is work to do over the next twelve months to ensure compliance. All members of the parish need to be aware of the recent changes in legislation regarding child safety. As a result of the audit, a STOPline notice is included in the weekly Newsletter and another notice that children **must** be accompanied by their parent is placed in the sacristies, vesting room for servers in Boonah and in work sacristies of the churches.
- Several parishioners are in now dialogue about their Reception into the Catholic community and their Christian Initiation. *This is great news.*
- Fr. John is seriously looking at implementing a possible RCIA model for the **sacramental preparation of children for Confirmation and Eucharist**. Extensive discussion has occurred with several parishioners, our parish school leadership team, parish school staff and various Archdiocesan agencies as well as people in the local Church of Brisbane who participated in the review of the Church of Brisbane's Sacramental Policy for Children for families, parishioners, and the community. It is hoped to invite and form catechists and leaders from the parish to assist with this preparation. Confirmation penned for Sunday 22nd August has now been deferred. Both sacraments, Confirmation and Eucharist, will be celebrated before the end of 2021.
- The date for the next *South Coast Deanery Combined meeting* is Wednesday 1st. September. Two or three parishioners will be invited to accompany Fr. John.
- Fr. John will be taking **annual leave** from 2nd August - 30th August. Fr. Jim Smith, recently retired Brisbane priest who hails from Ipswich, has kindly agreed to supply the four weekends

starting from 7/8th August. Ipswich parish priests will cover any funerals and emergencies during this time.

- The **60th anniversary of the blessing of All Saints' Church**: A project to mark this significant anniversary in the year of the 2021 Plenary Council will be undertaken: reinstalling the original waist-high sandstone base of the baptismal font with a new bowl. It will be installed in its original place – the gathering area/narthex; installing a leadlight glass in place of the yellow/ gold glass from floor to ceiling in the same area. The possibility of flowing water in the font will also be explored. Parishioners will be invited to make financial gifts to fund our 60th anniversary project. John requested the pastoral council organize a working group prepare possible celebrations in addition to the celebration of the eucharist with Archbishop Coleridge on Sunday 31st October at 10.30am. Councillors advised this group would need at least two months preparation.



The picture (right) shows the portable font created many decades ago. It is currently placed where the original sandstone font was installed. Behind the font is shown the existing panes of glass. These are to be replaced by a contemporary leadlight installation featuring the flowing waters of baptism and the Spirit gifted in baptism to all who are reborn in Christ from the font. The parish is in a draft planning phase with highly respected Australian glass artist, Lee Howes, from Newcastle. Lee has completed several church projects in her career.

- The **Parish Finance Council** is now able to be renewed and reformed. Fr. John has approached new members and consulted with several previous members. He is appreciative of the willingness of several parishioners to serve on this council.
- It was decided to print a hard copy parish bulletin every six weeks as it coincided with news from the Parish Council meeting. The next PPC meeting is Monday 6th September 6.30pm-7.45pm.



PETER KEARNEY
Concert-Reflection

**SIGNS OF
HOPE
PEOPLE OF
FAITH**

Songs & Stories

Friday 6th August, 7.00pm
St. Mary's Church
Elizabeth Street, Woodend,
Donations Welcome

Composer of 'Fill My House', 'The Beatitudes',
Where is your Song, my Lord?

- Our northern sister parish, Ipswich Catholic Community, is hosting a concert-reflection by Peter Kearney on Friday 6th August from 7.00pm. To book:

<https://www.trybooking.com/BSODN> There is no charge for the concert; donations welcome.



Peter Kearney Concert

SIGNS of HOPE – PEOPLE of FAITH

Songs linked by stories and reflections about people whose faithful lives have brought compassion, hope and justice into our world.

Friday 6th August, 7.00pm
St. Mary's Church
Elizabeth Street, Woodend,
IPSWICH CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
Donations Welcome

3. On 13th June, the Archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal Cupich, delivered the opening keynote address at the second "Laudato Si' and the U.S. Catholic Church" conference in Omaha, Nebraska.

It is titled "From 'Not Enough' to Bold Embrace: U.S. Catholic Responses to Laudato Si'.

Laudato Si' needs to be understood as a renewed call to conversion, to respond to Jesus' invitation to think differently about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature. *Blase Cupich.*

The full text may be read [here](#).

4. Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen, bishop of the Church of Parramatta, delivered the annual *Dom Helder Camara Lecture* in Parkville, Victoria on 30th June. He titled it: "My hope for the Plenary Council."

Plenary Council: Abundance of goodwill or the last throw of the dice?

With a few months to the first session of the long-awaited Plenary Council (PC2020), we are finally headed down the home stretch. The initial phase of listening drew nearly 220,000 people across Australia and 17,500 individual and group submissions. These submissions were distilled into the six national theme papers and then further distilled again into the working document and finally

the agenda. Momentum for the Plenary Council ebbed and flowed during this process, which has been disrupted by the pandemic.

By and large, there has been considerable goodwill, enthusiasm and even a sense of hope for the future of the Church in Australia in the post-Royal Commission period. Robert Fitzgerald who – among other prominent roles – is the new Chair of Caritas Australia, once enthused that the Plenary Council is the only game in town. For a country of about five million nominal Catholics, the initial response was quite remarkable. Perhaps, for many of the disenfranchised, it is the last throw of the dice. I wouldn't put all my eggs in one basket, though.



Some of you might have heard or even attended the first of the three convocation series organised by the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR). There were 3,000 participants, including myself. We heard a powerful and inspiring address by Sr Joan Chittister. Catholicism “must grow up”, she said, “beyond the parochial to the global, beyond one system and one tradition, to a broader way of looking at life and its moral, spiritual, ethical frameworks.”

That is the kind of stretching of the imagination and dreaming of the transformation of the Church that many Catholics are thirsting for. Few Catholics have any appetite left for cosmetic changes, mediocrity or worst, restorationism dressed up as renewal. We have struggled under the weight of the old ecclesial paradigm of clerical order, control and hegemony with a penchant for triumphalism, self-referential pomp and smugness. We yearn for a Church that commits to a God-oriented future of equal discipleship, relational harmony, wholeness and sustainability.

The revitalisation and convergence of many lay reform groups in response to the Plenary Council is no small development for the Church in contemporary Australia. It is a sign of the “growing up” that Joan spoke about. Australian Catholics are growing up beyond the passive, subservient to the co-responsible agents for the transformation of the Church. In Germany, there is a lay body called Central Committee, which plays a key role in their Synodal Assembly, including having one of its members as co-president of the said structure. Perhaps this unique feature is part of the legacy of the Reformation in the German Church.

Is the Church in Australia in pole position for deep reform?

The Church in Australia is uniquely positioned to move into a new fresh future. Yes, it is true that we have been humbled and reduced to near irrelevancy by the sexual abuse crisis. The Royal Commission, though being the lightning rod, has also served as a necessary wake-up call for Australian Catholics. Indeed, no other country in the world has conducted a similar national inquiry, which is as comprehensive in its scope as ours. This has brought about a heightened level of consciousness and an unprecedented momentum for deep reform.

In many areas, Australia punches above its weight. Could we be a leading light in the struggle for a more fit-for-purpose Church in this place and in this time? Could Australian Catholics rise to the challenge and co-create the synodal Church that Pope Francis has envisaged? While the Plenary Council may not address all of the issues of importance, it is certainly worth the effort in discerning the roadmap for the future.

Recently, Cardinal Marx of Germany tendered his resignation in a personal gesture to take responsibility for sexual abuses by priests over the past decades. In Chile, the bishops after a period of discernment offered to resign *en masse* for similar reasons. This collective act of contrition is totally unprecedented, and it shows the depth of the crisis in the Church. Whether or not we bishops of Australia should make the same radical gesture remains an open question. However, what is indisputable is the need for deep institutional change that will restore confidence and trust in the Church. Nothing less than a root-to-branch reform that will align our minds and hearts to the Gospel will do.

What the Church needs is not simply a renewal or an updating of methods of evangelising. Rather, what we desperately need is an inner conversion, a radical revolution in our mindsets and patterns of action. Gerald Arbuckle speaks of refounding as opposed to renewal. This refounding means going to the very cultural roots and a hope-filled journey into the paschal mystery for mission under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Unless we genuinely repent of institutional failures and unless we convert to the radical vision of Christ and let it imbue our attitudes, actions and pastoral practices, we will not be able to restore confidence and trust in the Church.

Conversion is one of the key areas on the agenda of the Plenary Council. It is framed in terms of our openness to learn and meet the needs of the world we live in. As a result, the questions revolve around our engagement with First Nations peoples, with the marginalised and the vulnerable. However, one wonders if conversion needs to be framed not just in terms of our openness to learn and meet the needs of others but also in terms of our examination of the Church's attitude and treatment of racial minorities, women, LGBTQ+ individuals and others. Until we have the courage to admit the old ways of being Church, which is steeped in a culture of clerical power, dominance and privilege, we cannot rise to a Christ-like way of humility, inclusivity, compassion and powerlessness.

There is a sense in which the Church must change into a more Christ-like pattern of humility, simplicity and powerlessness as opposed to worldly triumphalism, splendour, dominance and power. Christians in the post-Royal Commission are like the Jews after the exile. The future of the

Church, like the New Jerusalem that the exilic prophets often speak of, will not be revitalised by way of simply repeating what was done in the past. It will not be simply a restoration project or doing the old things better. Rather, we must have the courage to do new things; we must be open to the Spirit leading us to new horizons even as we tend to revert to the old ways.

Change of era and new way of being Church in the world

Many Catholics hope that the PC2020 will see a change in a number of priority issues such as greater inclusion of the laity, the role of women, clerical celibacy et cetera. While it is important that there is an openness and boldness to discuss these matters, what is more important is to envision a new way of being Church in the world.

The model of the Church based on clerical hegemony has run its course. Insofar as it is deeply embedded in patriarchal and monarchical structures, it is incapable of helping us to meet the needs of the world and culture in which we live. We have long moved out of the *Ancien Régime* and the age of absolute monarchs. We are on this side of the secular state and the rise of democracy. Yet it seems that the deeply entrenched patriarchal and monarchical structures of the Church have failed to correspond with our lived experience.

For the Church to flourish, it is crucial that we come to terms with the flaws of clericalism and move beyond its patriarchal and monarchical matrix. What is urgent is that we need to find fresh ways of being Church and fresh ways of ministry and service for both men and women disciples. New wine into new wineskins! The new wine of God's unconditional love, radical inclusivity and equality needs to be poured into new wineskins of humility, mutuality, compassion and powerlessness. The old wineskins of triumphalism, authoritarianism and supremacy, abetted by clerical power, superiority, and rigidity are breaking.

It is worth noting that at the recent Synod on the Amazon, the synod bishops say they consider it "urgent" for the Church to "promote and confer ministries for men and women in an equitable manner.

"It is the Church of baptised men and women that we must strengthen by promoting ministeriality and, above all, the awareness of baptismal dignity," they state. Beyond these generic statements, it remains to be seen how women can share in the decision-making power and institutionalised ministries in the Church.

The Church cannot have a better future if it persists in the old paradigm of triumphalism, self-reference and male dominance. So long as we continue to exclude women from the Church's governance structures, decision-making processes and institutional functions, we deprive ourselves of the richness of our full humanity. So long as we continue to make women invisible and inferior in the Church's language, liturgy, theology and law, we impoverish ourselves. Until we have truly incorporated the gift of women and the feminine dimension of our Christian faith, we will not be able to fully energise the life of the Church.

In the world where the rules are made by the strong and the structures of power favour the privileged, the Church must be true to its founding stories and responsive to the living presence of God. It must find ways to promote a community of equals and empower men and women disciples to share their gifts for human flourishing and the growth of the Kingdom.

Our founding stories are those of emancipation and liberation. It is the story of Moses and the movement of the new social order against the tyranny of empires that lies at the heart of the prophetic imagination. It inspires Mary who sings of the God who overthrows the powerful and lifts up the lowly. It is the story of Jesus who washes the feet of his followers and subverts the power structures that are tilted towards the strong. This narrative of the new reality that envisions radical reordering of human relationships was in fact the hallmark of the earliest Christian movement.

The Church must continue to embody the alternative relational paradigm. This alternative relational paradigm turns the world's system of power structures on its head because it is rooted in the biblical narrative of the new social order of radical inclusion, justice and equality. The Church cannot have a prophetic voice in society if we fail to be the model egalitarian community where those disadvantaged on account of their race, gender, social status and disability find empowerment for a dignified life.

Towards a Church of co-responsibility and synodality

Martin Luther King, Jr famously said that the arc of history is bent toward justice. The parallel statement I want to make is that the arc of the Church is bent towards co-responsibility or synodality. Let me explain.

The way of being Church has evolved over the centuries. When, after the early centuries of persecution, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the early tradition of egalitarianism gave way to a more clerical and hierarchical governance system that actually took on many features of the Empire. Throughout the long reign of Christendom and up to the Second Vatican Council, the Church often understood itself predominantly as a perfect society. Its institutional functions and dynamics were steeped in clericalism.

Ministries gradually became the domain of the ordained. They were all subsumed under a very cultic priesthood (set apart for the sacraments). Even the ancient ministry of deacon became a casualty of the process known as the "*cursus honorum*". This means that no one could begin "the course of honour" unless he is destined and qualified for the priesthood (no married and certainly not women!). The shift towards the celibate priesthood as the normative form of ministry effectively deprived the Church of the richness of ministries as attested by the New Testament.

At the Second Vatican Council, there was a shift in the Church's self-understanding. The dominant metaphor of "*a societas perfecta*" gave way to a more biblical image of a pilgrim people. The priesthood of faithful was rediscovered along with the affirmation that the working of the Holy Spirit was granted not to the ordained only but to all baptised. Ecclesial ministries were understood

in such a way as to fully honour what Paul says, “everyone is given the grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ”.

Pope Paul VI accordingly suppressed the minor orders and opened some of these ministries to the lay faithful. Now some 60 years later (talk about the glacial speed of change in the Church), Pope Francis took a step further with two recent important decisions. In January this year, he opened to women the “installed” lay ministries of lector and acolyte, previously restricted to men. Then just a few weeks ago, he responded to an idea that sat untouched since the Council and established the installed ministry of catechist. The Pope called for “men and women of deep faith and human maturity, active participants in the life of the Christian community, capable of welcoming others, being generous and living a life of fraternal communion.”

Pope Francis affirms that ‘this path of synodality’ is precisely what “God expects of the Church of the third millennium.” He gave new impetus to the doctrine of the *sensus fidei fidelium*, stating that the path of synodality represents an indispensable prerequisite for infusing the Church with a renewed missionary impulse: all the members of the Church are called to be active subjects of evangelisation and “missionary disciples”.

The Church has entered a new era that is characterised by a crisis of a top-down centralised ecclesiology. With Vatican II, the *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* led to a more biblical paradigm of a pilgrim People of God, called to be the sacrament of the Kingdom and the prophetic witness in the world. The emphasis on the superiority of the ordained gave way to an ecclesial communion based on common baptism.

Pope Francis has applied a critical lens through which the Church is renewed for the sake of its mission for the poor. The Church is helped to decentralise and impelled towards the peripheries. The Church, the People of God, should walk together, sharing the burdens of humanity, listening to the cry of the poor, reforming itself and its own action, first by listening to the voice of the humble, the *anawim* of the Hebrew Scriptures, who were at the heart of Jesus’ public ministry.

Conclusion

The COVID crisis, the Pope says, has exposed our vulnerability. It has revealed the fallacy of individualism as the organising principle of our Western society. It has given the lie to a “myth of self-sufficiency” that sanctions rampant inequalities and frays the ties that bind societies together. If we want a different world, we must become a different people.

I wonder if the crisis in the Church today could be framed in analogous terms. In fact, we are at a point in history where all the indications point to a perfect storm: sexual abuse crisis, near-total collapse of active participation, loss of credibility, shrinking pool of clerical leadership et cetera. Some have likened the state of the Church to Shakespeare’s state of Denmark. It is hardly an exaggeration!

This monumental crisis above all has exposed the weakness and indeed the unsustainability of the clericalist model. Hence, if we are to emerge out of this, we will need to boldly embrace a new

ecclesiology from below that has regained momentum thanks to the prophetic leadership of Pope Francis. We must take up the call issued to St Francis, “Go and rebuild my Church that is falling into ruins”. It is not only possible; it is the most exciting time for us to construct a new future.

It humbles us to know that God is with us in the mess and even in the perceived irrelevancy of the Church. It comforts us, too, to know that the Church was not at its best when it reached the heights of its power in what was known as Christendom.

It was the Church of the Catacombs that shone forth its best rays of hope ironically when it was poor, persecuted and powerless. Christendom and for the most part of history, we have tried to be great, powerful and dominant.

It was no coincidence that Dom Helder Camara and many of his Latin American colleagues chose to make the so-called “Pact of the Catacombs” as a way to return to the roots and foundations of the Church. They weren’t just letting the fresh air of the Second Vatican Council blow away the cobwebs and the manacles. They were determined to recapture the original and radical spirit of the earliest Christian movement.

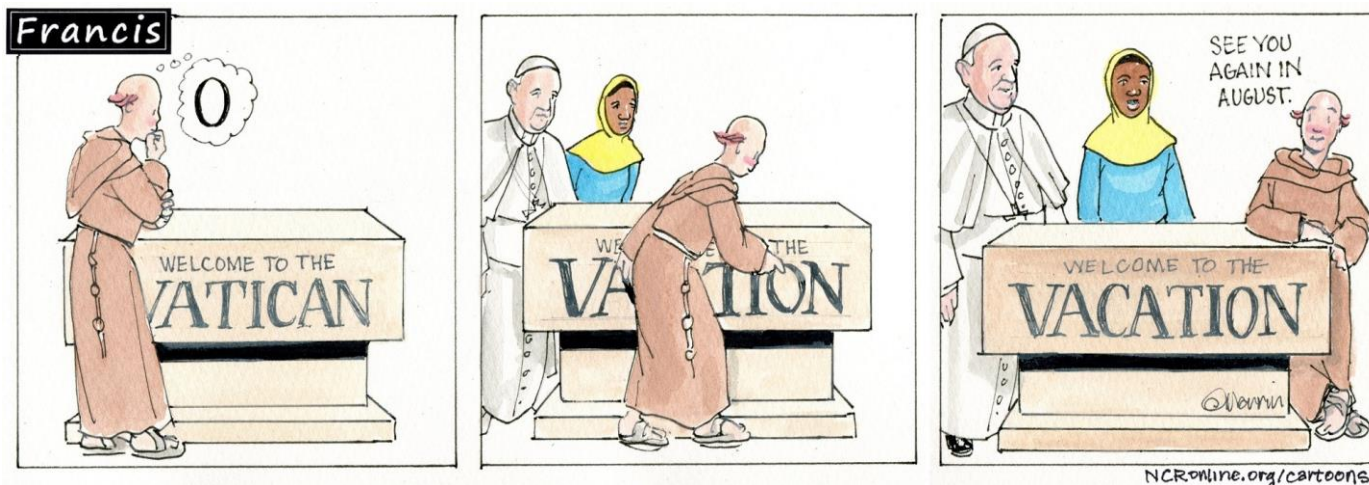
It may be a long and winding road to a vision of the poor, humble but empowering and leavening force in the world. But as Teilhard de Chardin SJ wrote: “the only task worthy of our efforts is to construct the future”. I pray that this historic once in a generation Plenary Council may be an expression of such effort. May we have the courage, boldness and *parrhesia* to move from the old paradigm of triumphalism, power and splendour to the new ways of being Church that will convey the freshness of the Gospel.



5. Some music! As we listen to excerpts from John 6 across 3 of the 5 following Sundays, you may enjoy John Michael Talbot’s song *I am the Bread of Life*: [here](#).

It is from his album Master Collection v. 1 (1989).

6. A few people have asked about the weekly “Francis, the comic strip.” The cartoonist behind Francis, Pat Marrin, has taken a holiday and new cartoons will be returning in August.







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