



NEEDS

Diocesan Pastoral Council

THE PRESENT CONTEXT AND NEEDS

Today the Church finds itself in a very different context than that of the Second Vatican Council or even of the time of the 1989 Archdiocesan Synod. We are a Church that is once more in a very missionary situation. Many parts of the Archdiocese are experiencing population decline and reduced social cohesion; others are growing rapidly. Formal participation in many parishes is declining while each of our ministries of outreach, whether social welfare, youth and young adults, health and aged care or education, are in ever increasing demand. We continue to be a strident voice for justice and for life but there is greater objection to the participation of people of faith in the public sphere.

At the same time, Pope Francis has reminded the world of the imperative of faith in terms of responding to the various crises which confront us: climate change, the pandemic, sexual abuse, the evil of modern slavery and, more recently, war. He has been adept at recognising the power of the symbolic – such as his lone prayer vigil for the victims of the pandemic. However, he has also demanded that our symbols are followed by actions – hence his call that the Church is a field hospital of mercy, actively seeking out need and responding in tangible, practical ways.

In terms of the instruments of governance within the Church, especially the Australian Church, there is a great deal of recent and rich material available to the working party. A diocesan pastoral council is part of the Church's canonical framework and in recent years Pope Francis has called on the Church to be synodal in its discernment and decision-making. In Australia, the Light from the Southern Cross report was commissioned by the Australian Bishops and our Archdiocese has responded to the report. In the process of preparing for the current Plenary Council of the Australian Church and the forthcoming Synod of the whole Church, there is a wealth of Archdiocesan data. In March Pope Francis issued, *Praedicate Evangelium*, an Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Curia and its service to the Church and the World. Each of these documents will be considered by the Working Party to develop a sense of our needs as an Archdiocese at this time and how we might best develop structures that serve the needs of the Church and the world.