



WITH LAMPS ABLAZE



Apostolic
Priorities for
the Archdiocese
of Brisbane
from 2023



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CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	4
WHY NOW?	6
LARGER THEMES.....	7
THE SEVEN PRIORITIES	11

This document was written by Archbishop Mark Coleridge whilst on his annual New Year retreat in a moment of inspiration from the Holy Spirit.





PREFACE

Before ever there was electricity, lamps were an essential part of life, which is why archeology finds oil-lamps all over the ancient world. However humble it was, the lamp spoke of light triumphing over darkness, which is how creation begins: God speaks

the word “Light” and there is light (Gen 1:3). This light comes before the physical sources of light, the sun, the moon, the stars, because for the Scripture the true and unfailing source of light is the word of God, which precedes and succeeds the physical

sources of light (cf Matt 24:29). The Psalmist takes up this theme: “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path” (119:105).

In the New Testament, lamps are linked to Christ and the Church. In the Book of Revelation, the seer John writes: “The seven lampstands are the seven Churches” (1:20). The Church is not only the stand which holds the light; the Church bears the light who is Christ. Jesus himself goes further: “You are the light of the world... When a lamp is lit it is put not under a basket but on a stand, where it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that seeing your good works they will give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:14-16). The Church is the light because Christ is the light, *lumen gentium*, and Christ dwells in the Church as the light which nothing and no-one can dispel (cf John 1:5).

Yet the lamps must be properly tended if they are to give the light which leads to him who is the light. Think of the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids which points to the wisdom we require:

“The kingdom of heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but they took no oil

with them. The wise ones took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was delayed in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry went up: ‘The bridegroom is coming! Go out to meet him!’ Then all the bridesmaids woke and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ While they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The bridesmaids who were prepared went in with him to the wedding banquet. The door was then closed.

Later the others came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ Keep watch therefore, because you do not know the day or the hour” (Matt 25:1-13).

In the Church now our lamps have not gone out: far from it. But they have begun to flicker and their light has dimmed. We need our lamps to burn brightly as we go out to meet him who is the light, the one who said: “I have come to bring fire on the earth and how I wish it were blazing already” (Luke 12:49). What follows here is intended to set the seven lamps of the Church in Brisbane ablaze, so that the fire of the Risen Lord may touch the earth and show us the way through the darkness into the future.





WHY NOW?

As the Spirit-driven journey of the Plenary Council continues and as I move beyond ten years as Archbishop of Brisbane, it's time for a new focusing of our energies as a spur into the future.

Pope Francis has said that ours isn't so much an era of change but a change of era; and COVID-19 has made that even clearer than it was. The pandemic has been a huge accelerant: things that were present, though subdued, before the virus struck have accelerated and are now dramatically evident. In that sense COVID has brought the future upon us with a rush.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is some years behind us, but its implications are still very much with us. The Royal Commission made clear the need for cultural change in the Catholic Church rather than just a change of protocols and procedures. That cultural change is coming, but slowly; and in that sense the Royal Commission is not a thing of the past. So too Pope Francis has called for a change of culture in the Church, summoning us to be more missionary and outward-looking at a time when we're under pressure and may be tempted to turn inwards as a form of self-protection.

LARGER THEMES

What you find here is not a plan but a set of priorities, though in time it could become a more formal plan with actions for implementation, a clear time-frame and an allocation of responsibilities. But before I turn to the priorities, let me sketch some of the larger themes which provide the context:

- These priorities have been conceived and developed under the influence of the Holy Spirit who at this time is moving in the Church in new ways. Left to our own devices we can do nothing, which is why the Risen Jesus breathed into the disciples the Holy Spirit to bring the Church to birth (cf John 20:22). But the breathing isn't just a thing of the past. The same Lord breathes into the Church the same Spirit in our own time. The charismatic renewal has brought to the Church a deeper sense of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The renewal seemed exotic, even alien when it first appeared in the Catholic Church, but now its influence is felt everywhere; and many of the newer communities that have emerged since the Second Vatican Council have been formed under the influence of the charismatic renewal. Now the whole Church needs to attend more closely to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. This is certainly true in Australia where the Plenary Council was born of the Holy Spirit and has continued under the Spirit's influence. That's why the Council is a summons to "listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches" (Rev 3:22). To hear the Spirit's voice in the midst of all the other voices



can be very challenging. It requires the process that we call discernment; and this plan is the fruit of discernment, as its implementation will have to be too. We will have to learn more of the art of discernment as we move forward.

- I have called these priorities apostolic rather than pastoral or missionary. Pastoral and mission are words that have, for good reason perhaps, been adopted by others in recent times; but apostolic remains a word that is distinctive to the Scripture and the Church and for good reason. We speak of the bishops as the successors of the apostles; and that is true. But it is no less true that the whole Church, the community of all the baptised, is apostolic; and that's what this plan presumes and seeks to promote. We profess our faith in "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church"; and apostolic here means a

Church called by Jesus to himself (to be formed for mission) and then sent out into the world (to engage in mission). It begins with Jesus – his call, his teaching and the encounter with him risen from the dead which brings the Church into being. So our planning begins with Jesus and the encounter with him who breathes the Holy Spirit into us (cf John 20:22).

- The Plenary Council and the global Synod, as processes under the Spirit’s influence, frame these priorities, which want to feed off the synodal processes of recent years and create momentum in the Archdiocese in preparation for the decisions of the Council and Synod. We can’t just sit back and wait till their decisions are handed down to us. These priorities are part of the process of Council and Synod which the Holy Spirit has generated in the Church both local and universal. They are intended to lead the Archdiocese more deeply into the experience of synodality – a word which can sound strange but which takes us to the heart of what the Spirit said to the Churches in the Second Vatican Council and is saying to the Churches in our own time. In that sense, an important part of the background of these priorities is Pope Francis’ programmatic talk on synodality given on 17 October 2015.



- In that talk, the Pope began defining synodality by speaking of a *listening* Church – a Church which listens to all the voices in order to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. There is a danger that the Church, which has received the gift of truth from Christ, will always be seeking to speak that truth and never pause to listen to those to whom we are speaking. Yet the listening must come before the speaking, lest we speak in ways that people simply do not understand or we end up answering questions which no-one is asking. We can sound like a Church that has all the answers without ever knowing the real questions. So too within the Church we can misunderstand the relationship between the teaching Church (*ecclesia docens*) and the learning Church (*ecclesia discens*). In the past it was thought at times that the ordained were the teaching Church and the non-ordained the learning Church: the clergy speak and the others listen. But the Spirit is saying to us now that the whole people of God is both a teaching Church and a learning Church. All must listen and learn; and all must then speak the word of God that they have heard. These priorities, therefore, come from an experience of listening over time; and they seek to lead the Archdiocese as a whole more deeply into the experience of listening.
- This is especially important at a time



like this when it's unclear where we are going. This is an Abrahamic moment. Abraham, our father in faith, was called to leave all that was familiar to set out on a journey on the basis of a seemingly impossible promise – that God, who had come to Abraham out of nowhere, would give him a child of his own when his wife was barren and a land of his own when all the land was taken. Abraham decides to take the risk and says yes to the call; but he is given no road-map or GPS. He doesn't know where he's going (Hebr 11:8); God alone knows where the journey will take him. That's why Abraham has to keep his eye and ear fixed on God and follow where God leads, however strange that may seem. All goes well for Abraham as long as he keeps his eye and ear on God and follows. All goes wrong when he loses his nerve and decides to take charge himself. The same is true for us. Our only mistake as we head into an uncertain future will be to take our eye or ear off God. If we no longer listen to God's voice but listen instead to our own, we are sure to come to grief. That's

why these priorities are designed to make us a more Abrahamic Church and, in that sense, a more biblical Church. On our journey into the future, the Bible must become in new and deeper ways a crucial resource in enabling us to hear the word of God. It isn't a road-map or GPS but a God-given travelling companion in which a living voice can be heard.

- A fundamentally important text of another kind is Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which he set out the programme of his apostolic ministry. But more than that, it's a programme for the whole Church as we move through this change of era into the future which God is preparing. It will help us implement the plan, then, if we have the Bible in one hand and *Evangelii Gaudium* in the other. Scripture and Tradition, text and interpretation, guide our journey at every point, since both were formed under the influence of the Holy Spirit and must be received no less under the Spirit's influence.

THE SEVEN PRIORITIES





1. TEACHING PRAYER

We must first find our way into a new and deeper experience of prayer not just as one of many elements in a busy life but as a way of life for all the baptised. Often we urge people to pray but don't really teach them how to pray in a way that moves beyond the prayers of childhood and youth. Now is the time to teach ways of prayer which are mature and all-embracing. Christian prayer begins not with speaking but with listening; and learning to pray is therefore learning to listen - to listen even to the silences of God. If all we do is speak, then in the words of Jesus we "babble like the pagans" (Matt 6:7). But if we speak after listening and in response to God who always has the first word, then we speak according to the mind of the Holy Spirit. That's what we need to teach and learn.

In the Gospel of Mark, we read that Jesus called the twelve apostles to himself, first of all, "that they might be with him" (3:14). This is where the mission starts: *being with* Jesus, which is what prayer is. Then and only then, we read, they are "sent out to proclaim [the Gospel]" and are given "authority over evil spirits" (ibid). The sending and empowering come only after they have "been with" Jesus, seeing him in action, listening to his word. Pope St John Paul II said that our communities need to become "schools of prayer" where anyone can come to learn what the Pope calls "the art of prayer" at this time when there is a widespread hunger for spirituality (Novo Millennio Ineunte, 32-33). This again should be part of the Church's special expertise, something unique we have to offer.



2. RESHAPING PARISH COMMUNITIES

Our current structures are based upon the facts of an earlier time and our current mode of provision is unsustainable. In the cities at least we have too many parishes and too many churches. Urban parishes were established on the assumption that people had to be able to walk to church and at a time when the numbers attending Mass were much larger. Many of our parishes are pressed financially and cannot provide the range of services which a missionary Church requires. Therefore, we need – sensibly and over time – to move towards larger configurations of a community of communities where the concentration of personnel and the sharing of resources would allow a greater range of services for the sake of the Gospel. This will be more difficult in rural areas than urban areas, but the

same principle of sharing personnel and resources for the sake of mission applies.

These communities of communities (missions, if you prefer) would be led by an appropriately formed and officially commissioned team which could include a priest, a deacon, a religious, a school principal, a catechist and a youth minister. The makeup of the leadership team may vary from place to place. The catechist mentioned here is not someone who “teaches religion” in the narrower sense. It is understood more as a lay leader in the broader sense, along the lines sketched by Pope Francis in his decree *Antiquum Ministerium* and in line with the practice in other parts of the world, like the Churches of the Pacific. We have this year launched a formation programme for candidates for the ministry of catechist.



3. BRINGING CULTURAL COMMUNITIES TO THE CENTRE

The face of the Church around the world is changing as the centre of gravity shifts from places like Europe and North America (and Australia) to Africa, Asia and Latin America. What is true globally is also true here, at least in the bigger cities. Certainly in the Archdiocese the presence of people who have come from overseas – from Vietnam, the Philippines, the Pacific islands, India, Sri Lanka, Latin America, Africa – is growing stronger. You only have to look at the congregations in the cathedral. If you were to remove from one of the larger Sunday congregations people of Asian background, for instance, there would be

few left. These cultural communities have for a long time been regarded – and perhaps have regarded themselves – as exotic satellites in a largely Anglo-Celtic Church. But that is no longer the case. These large and growing communities have gifts for the whole Church, and increasingly the centre of gravity in the Church here is moving in their direction. Therefore, they have to be brought more to centre-stage in the life and mission of the Archdiocese, since much of the real spiritual energy in the Church here is found among them. This again will involve significant cultural change for the whole Church in this part of the world.



4. RESPONDING TO ABUSE AND THE ABUSED

For all that has been done in recent decades, there is still much to be done in the Church to address the deeper cultural issues brought to light by the sexual abuse crisis and in particular by the Royal Commission. In responding to abuse and the abused, we need to move beyond considerations of law and finance. Paradoxically, where the Church should have been strongest – the spiritual and pastoral accompaniment and care of those abused – is where we have been weakest. Of course we need to attend to legal and

financial matters, but the paramount concern needs to be the good of those abused. Not all victims and survivors look to the Church for spiritual and pastoral accompaniment and care, but some do and others may in time, if ever trust can be established. We can learn from experience elsewhere in seeking to respond more effectively to abuse and the abused. Unless we do, this will remain a gaping wound – certainly for victims and survivors but for the whole Church as well – which makes it hard for us to move in the future.



5. ENGAGING ANEW WITH FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES

If sexual abuse is a running sore at the heart of the Church, the injustice done to First Nations peoples in this country is a running sore at the heart of the nation. It is contemporary Australia's original sin. The Church has been involved with the Indigenous peoples in various ways since European settlement. But, however well intentioned these efforts were, many of them have been counter-productive, based as they were upon an unconscious racism and a serious failure to read Indigenous cultures and listen to Indigenous people. Many Indigenous leaders have noted the recent deterioration in Indigenous communities, despite legal and political gains. But there is also fresh hope now that the Uluru Statement, endorsed by the Archdiocese and the Bishops Conference, will open up new possibilities.

In the Archdiocese we have adopted a Reconciliation Action Plan. That's a good start, but it's only that. The RAP needs to be implemented and taken further; there is more to be imagined and done. We need a genuinely new engagement of the Church with the First Nations peoples, especially in an Archdiocese like this where the Indigenous presence is strong. A new engagement will mean, first of all, listening to Indigenous voices, and believing that we can learn if we really listen. In the past, non-Indigenous Australia has struggled to believe that we could learn anything from First Nations peoples. They could learn from us, but not we from them. That has to change, both in the Church and in Australia more generally. Then the listening and learning need to lead to action.



6. IMPLEMENTING INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

Pope Francis has offered the Church and the world a prophetic vision and programme in his two closely related texts *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti*; and these must be deeply embedded in our plan. It's thought at times that *Laudato Si* is simply about climate change; but in fact, it's about much more. It presents a vision of the interconnectedness of all things in the world both natural and human. Natural and human ecology interact in mysterious and unmistakable ways. To interfere with one is to interfere with the other; to promote the good of one is to promote the good

of the other. *Fratelli Tutti* focuses more upon human ecology in speaking of the radical interconnectedness of all human beings at a moment when alienation and polarisation are making disconnectedness seem the norm. The Church is called in such a moment to be a sign of contradiction, speaking in a way that rises above politics and economics so that a genuinely biblical and Christian voice can be heard. The question is how we do this in the Archdiocese – not just in word but in action. This again touches on the need for cultural change.



7. EMBEDDING SYNODAL GOVERNANCE

We have begun the long and complex process of moving towards a synodal mode of governance in the Church, but the process is far from complete; and there is much to be done to embed synodal governance more securely at every level in the Archdiocese. This is more a matter of culture than structure, but it does have structural implications, given that many of our structures reflect a mode of governance that is more hierarchical than synodal. In 2024 we will celebrate an Archdiocesan Synod to embed the decisions and decrees of the Plenary Council in the life and mission of the Archdiocese and to set in train a regular rhythm of Archdiocesan Synods.

We have also undertaken a thorough review of governance in the Archdiocese, which may see the establishment of an Archdiocesan Council, building upon the current Archdiocesan Finance Council to make it more a Pastoral or Mission Council. Deaneries and parishes too will have to ask how they might move to a more synodal mode of governance. Synodality implies inclusion, and therefore we will have to keep asking how we might at every level include women in the decision-making processes of the Archdiocese. So too synodality requires transparency and accountability, and we will have to keep asking what we need to do make the Archdiocese more transparent and accountable.



Finally, it needs to be said that these seven priorities are closely interrelated. You can't focus on one to the exclusion of the others. Nor are they arranged in order of priority. The order could be rearranged in any number of ways. It may be better to think of them as a circle in motion rather than a static list hierarchically arranged. What is presented here is the fruit of listening over time. But

it is by no means the finished product, and the listening doesn't stop here. These priorities are offered to the Archdiocese as a whole so that each of you has a chance to reflect, consider what might resonate with you personally and what action might be taken in response to these priorities. May God who has begun the good work in us bring it to fulfilment (cf Phil 1:6).

Let us pray.

Grant, all-merciful God, that your faithful people may watch without fail for the coming of your Son, and joyfully hasten with lighted lamps to meet him when he comes.
Who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, forever and ever.
Amen.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Archbishop Mark Coleridge
Archbishop of Brisbane





